

The Thrill Book

Semi-Monthly

Sept. 15, 1919
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THE THRILL BOOK

SEMIMONTHLY

Vol. II CONTENTS FOR SEPTEMBER 15, 1919

No. 6

ONE COMPLETE NOVEL

The Red Lure *Frank L. Packard* 3

TWO SERIALS

The Gift Wife *Rupert Hughes* 60
In Four Parts—Part I

The Heads of Cerberus *Francis Stevens* 104
In Five Parts—Part III

ONE TWO PART STORY

The Silver Menace *Murray Leinster* 134
(Concluded)

FIVE SHORT STORIES

Undying Hatred *Tod Robbins* 50

House of the Nightmare *Edward Lucas White* 54

The Case of the Man Blind *T. E. Transeau* 95

Tales of the Double Man—No. 5 *Clyde Broadwell* 127

Filbert's Grand Final *B. G. Priestley* 150

MISCELLANEOUS

Living Memories—Verse *Carl Buxton* 49

The Temple—A Sketch *Alphonse de la Ferté* 53

Let Them Tip Tables—Verse *Harry Kemp* 94

A Ballade of the Sea—Verse *Roy le Moyne* 102

To Spend with Ease—Verse *Charles Kiprooy* 133

Dissonance—Verse *Clark Ashton Smith* 149

The Love that Stirs Me So—Verse *Carl Buxton* 156

Thrilling Experiences 157

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The Thrill Book

Semi-Monthly

Vol. II

SEPTEMBER 15, 1919

No. 6

The Red Lure

by Frank L. Packard



CHAPTER I.

PRIESTS OF THE RED GOD.

A MAN leaned heavily against the opening of the hut and raised his clenched fist impotently above his head—then shuddered. He could not keep his eyes from it, and he had seen it many times during many days.

It was shaped like a beehive, and it was very large. Its diameter at the bottom was a good one hundred and fifty feet, and its height, to where the roof began to curve inward to the center, forming a bell-like dome, was thirty

feet. From the ground, in the perpendicular, to the crest of the dome, was fifty feet. Its walls were of heavy, rude-cut timber, and rough, grotesque figures of abhorrent design were daubed in variegated colors upon it. In the dome a narrow opening was cut, a foot in width, at most, traversing the circular surface from the eastern to the western edge, exactly and minutely calculated to the path of the sun's rays. This opening was covered with glass, that now, in the intense glare of the afternoon sun, reflected a dazzling light.

Around the structure, at a distance of some forty feet from the base, was

built a stout stockade of bamboo planted in triple parallel lines. It rose to the full height of the spine-armed stems, which, at the top, having thrown out their straight, horizontal branches, gave to the whole the aspect of a single encircling wall of enormous strength and thickness. It was without aperture, unbroken in its entire circuit.

Both structure and wall stood on a little knoll that, presumably, once covered with the thick vegetation of the tropics, was now completely bare to the gray-white sandy soil—like a natural pedestal, it seemed, for the queer, forbidding thing that was perched upon it.

Low hills rose on either side, and they, too, ran east and west. It was as though a giant hand had gouged a tiny valley across the breadth of the island, for, looking up or down, as one looks through the smaller end of a telescope, the converging slopes ended in a faint, contracted vista of sky and sea.

Around the knoll, at the bottom, was a circle of small, leaf-thatched, bamboo huts. Each faced upon the hill, none had another outlook; for, behind them, shutting them in, trees and undergrowth grew in profusion.

Again the man shook his fist, and then swept it fiercely across his eyes; they were red and swollen, his eyes, and they hurt—he attacked them as though, by sheer brute force, he would cow them into no longer irritating him. His hair was unshorn, his face stubbly black with beard growth, and his few clothes hung in rags upon his gaunt, thin frame. He was without shoes; his trousers, in a tattered fringe, reached barely an inch below his knees; and for the rest, a shirt, torn, buttonless, open from collar to waistline, completed his costume.

A moment he stood there, then turned and, bending, passed through the low opening into the hut. The in-

terior, for all the bright glare of the sun outside, was in semigloom—a little cooler, perhaps, but very little. Inside, he stood upright and looked toward the far end, from where there came the sound of heavy, labored breathing. He moved across the hut, and, squatting on the ground beside the sick man, picked up a palm leaf and mechanically began to fan both himself and the other with a long, sweeping movement of his forearm. It was hardly refreshing, but it afforded at least partial relief from the swarms of flies that buzzed so horribly, torturing his eardrums.

The sick man tossed restlessly, and finally rolled over, with his face toward the other. He began to talk through dry, parched lips—his eyes, bright with an unhealthy luster, stared out from a sunken, fever-flushed countenance.

"You must go to-night, Bob—if you can. You should have gone yesterday."

The man with the palm leaf stopped its motion for an instant, laughed unnaturally, and shook his head.

"We were to have drawn lots for it, professor."

"The lots have been drawn by a higher power than chance," returned the sick man grimly. "I cannot go."

"Nor I, then."

"Only one can go—no more—just one of us. And that is the only chance for us both. *We have seen the Red God.*" The professor stopped, and his eyes held, for an instant, significantly upon his companion; then he went on: "If I am to die because I am sick, I am to die. You cannot save me by staying—you may, if you go and can bring back help. Ssh!" He raised himself painfully to his elbow as the doorway darkened.

A short, stocky, muscular figure, naked but for a loin cloth, came swiftly in, carrying a bottle gourd of water and a mess of unappetizing food. These he set on the ground between the two

men, and leered from one to the other, shooting sharp glances from little black eyes half hidden by narrow lids. Neither Chinese nor Malay, he seemed more a mixture of both, and he was not a pleasant sight, with his bullet head shaved clean of every hair and his high, protruding cheek bones, over which the yellow skin was stretched like tight-drawn parchment. He talked, and the movement of his lips seemed to spread over his entire face, working it into a series of hideous contortions.

The sick man answered him once with a word in the native tongue. A further outburst of high-pitched chatter followed this, and then, as swiftly as he had come, the man went out.

Bob shivered, and, with a sullen, muttered curse, passed the water to the other.

"What did the devil say?" he asked.

"He says that to-morrow night is the great feast of the Red God, in which we must take our part, and a lot more that I couldn't make out," the professor answered.

There was silence between them for a moment, then the professor spoke again.

"There mustn't be any quixotic foolishness about this, Bob," he said. "We have saved food for a month, and night after night risked our lives, with the understanding from the first that it could be only one of us to go. Furthermore, you know that, if anything, the one who goes plays the braver part. It is almost a hopeless venture—almost certain death. There is just a chance, just a bare chance of success. If you win, you win for us both—if you lose, we both die. You must go to-night. To-morrow night there will be no opportunity."

"And when they find me gone—what of you? The devils will finish you on the spot."

"We've discussed that before," said

the professor wearily. "You know what the Red God is, and where, so far as I have been able to follow the legend with my scanty knowledge of the language, it came from. We are safe enough as long as we remain without effort to escape—only we must remain all our lives. None but priests have ever seen the Red God; and, inversely, to see it is to become a priest. Indeed, that is the basis of the ceremony of initiation into the priesthood. So we, you and I, because we *have* seen, are priests of the Red God—and our persons are sacred. They would have killed us but for that. But a priest may never leave the island under pain of death; I hardly think you need to ask me why."

"No, by Jove!" said Bob suddenly. "They're no fools on that score."

"And so you see"—the professor's cough was dry and hard, and he drank again deeply from the water gourd—"and so you see your going can in no way have any effect on me. But you, if you are caught, or are forced back after the attempt, could expect no——"

"I will go," said Bob suddenly. "Better anything than to drag out my days in the horror of this place."

"Yes," said the professor, and he nodded his head slowly. "Yes; that is right. And now, if you can, you had better sleep; anyway, stretch out and rest. You will need all your strength before you are through."

"Sleep!" jeered Bob. "My God, I'm in a fit condition to sleep, ain't I? Look at that!" He held up his hand; it shook like the vibrations of a tuning fork.

"Lie down! This is no time to play the fool," said the professor gruffly; but into his eyes, fever-burned as they were, crept a softer light that belied the lash of his words.

Bob started, and the red flamed quick to his cheeks. He opened his mouth to utter a bitter retort—and bit into them instead. Then, without a word, he

turned, went over to the far side of the hut, and stretched himself on his back.

The afternoon droned lazily away. Bob dropped into a fitful, uneasy doze, muttering incoherent, broken sentences. The professor, moaning occasionally, turned from side to side, his eyes now staring at the rude thatching of the roof above him, now resting on the younger man. Gradually the half light grew fainter, bringing some abatement in the merciless heat; grew fainter still, until one could scarce see across the interior of the hut. Without was utter silence, no movement, no sign of human life. The branches and the leaves hung listless, without even the lightest breeze to awaken them from their stupor. Inside, both men breathed stertorously; the flies buzzed ceaselessly.

Again the doorway darkened, and a voice, shrill, uncanny, screamed a single word in the vernacular—and was gone.

With a startled curse on his lips, Bob sprang instantly to his feet—and then laughed nervously, glancing over to where the professor lay.

The latter, too, had lifted himself to his elbow, but had sunk back again apathetically—it was evening, that was all; the hour of worship.

Bob walked to the opening, and stepped outside. The sun, now low, was just touching the western edge of the narrow glass slit in the great dome. It hung a moment, as though loath to go, glistened, scintillated—and then a great clamor rent the air.

Naked forms, naked but for the scanty loin cloths, were prostrate on their faces before their huts—men, women, and children, where before there had been no soul in sight, a circle of forms around the base of the knoll, their heads to the temple of the Red God, beating upon the earth.

The clamor died away, the cries and howls ceased, and now a chant, low, wailing, broke the silence that had ensued. From the temple issued white-

robed figures in single file, who walked with slow, measured steps to the hollow beating of some sort of drum. Three times they made the circuit close against the wall; each time with a greater distance separating one from the other, until at last, with regular intervals between them, they formed a complete circle around the temple. The chant rose higher and higher, and swelled into an unearthly medley of wild, mad cries, as from the huts the groveling worshippers added their voices to those of the priests upon the hill.

And then Bob laughed aloud, a wild, hysterical laugh; he had seen many things in the months that had gone, lived many lives in the days that had passed. He clapped his hands to his ears to drown out the hideous, discordant uproar, and stumbled back into the hut.

It was quite dark now, too dark even to distinguish the professor's face. He paused a moment, standing over the other, and then threw himself on the ground again.

An hour passed. The abominable, nerve-jangling outcries were changed into a droning hum of voices talking, the squeals of children at play, the occasional call, in a shrill, high tremolo, as one hailed another across the clearing. Fires burned without the huts, throwing the thicket behind them into deeper shadow, while from the Sacred Hill a larger fire leaped high in the air, and a constantly shifting reflection now lighted the interior of the hut with a misty yellow gleam, now left it plunged in blackness again.

Another hour passed, and then the professor spoke.

"It is time to go, Bob," he said in a low, steady voice.

Bob answered instantly, and, rising, went to the professor's side.

"There isn't much to say," went on the professor. "You know the location of the island. There aren't any

plans we can make, for your only chance lies in being picked up. And there, I am afraid, is the greatest risk. We're not in the steamers' tracks."

"There's bound to be other craft," returned Bob. "Proas and junks and trading schooners, and all that sort of thing. These seas are fairly thick with them, even if they don't land here. I'm not much afraid of that, if the weather holds. It won't matter what it is, so that I can get into civilization somewhere, except for the time it will take before I can get back here with an outfit that will tumble these devils' roofs about their ears and blow that cursed god house, with its crawling horrors, into kingdom come."

"Don't try anything of that sort, my boy, if you've any hope of saving me," said the professor grimly. "Come back by stealth; I shall be watching for you every night. Now go; good luck and God bless you!"

Bob took the other's hand, and held it in a long clasp.

"It seems a rotten thing to do to leave you like this," he muttered.

"I am really better," answered the professor; "and I've enough of the quinine left to pull me through. A week and I'll be around again. Yours is the risk, Bob, and I can only say God keep you safe. Go at once. Every minute is precious from now until morning."

"Good-by," murmured Bob with a half catch in his voice. "If I live I will be back."

Another hard-wrung pressure, then he dropped the professor's hand, and moved swiftly to the opening. Here he paused for an instant to assure himself that he was not observed, gave one glance backward, stooped, went out, and glided quickly around to the rear of the hut. Another second, and he had stepped into the shelter of the thicket.

Cautiously, treading lightly, he went

forward. It was pitch dark. The dense foliage of the trees in their upper branches was like a sable curtain, shutting out even a glimpse of starlight; and, well as he knew the way, he stumbled at nearly every step, bruising his naked feet. His head he protected by carrying his arms stretched out before him as a blind man walks. Night after night in this fashion he and the professor had groped their way over the two miles to the beach, and before dawn were back again within their hut. Lately he had gone alone—since the other had been sick.

Behind him the noises of the village grew fainter. He stopped to listen once, and stood for a long minute intent and strained; there was nothing, just the soft rustle of the foliage as the kiss of the night air stirred it. Under his breath he cursed his unstrung nerves, and went on again.

His progress was very slow, and it was an hour before, just ahead of him, the darkness grew less opaque. Presently, through the now thinning forest, he caught the shimmer of the quarter moon as it played upon the sea, and the low, musical ripple of lapping water upon the beach reached his ears.

Here, where the trees fringed the white, sandy beach, he stopped again, this time to get his bearings, and then, keeping within their shelter, he bore off to the right, paralleling the beach. Another ten minutes brought him out upon a little creek that ran inward toward the hills. Naturally only a shallow, narrow stream, it was now, at full tide, quite wide and deep.

He walked rapidly a few feet up the bank, and then, bending, began to drag at a heavy, clumsy object that lay hidden in the undergrowth. With some difficulty he got it to the edge of the creek, and pushed it into the water. It floated a bare few inches above the surface. He looked at the frail craft grimly—a ship's grating that he and the

professor had found one day washed ashore on the beach. It was lashed about now with bamboo and bits of driftwood, anything and everything they had found to increase its buoyancy—the lashing painfully done, with wound and twisted fibers of the native hemp. It would support the weight of one—they had tested that—just one, no more.

He went back again, and returned with two long bamboos, to one of which was fastened a patchwork sail, made of two shirts; the other was to be used for poling. He stepped the mast, a little to one end of the raft, in the support they had made for it by binding four short upright pieces of bamboo through the grating holes beneath, and returned to the bank a third time. The provisions they had hoarded were there, wrapped in leaves, as was also the water in the gourds, that they had filled farther up the creek, where it ran fresh and sweet when the tide was out. He dropped upon his knees, and began to gather them together; and then, intuitively, he stopped. His heart throbbed violently. He felt what he could not see—a human presence near him. Tight-lipped, he rose to his feet—and the next instant shot over full upon his back. Around his neck, like a greasy, sinuous coil, was the hot flesh of a naked arm, whose muscles, tightening, quivered against his throat. The man had leaped upon him from behind, pulling him backward to the ground; and now, with a grunt, as he suddenly disengaged his arm, had flung himself full upon Bob's body, one hand feeling for the throat clutch, while in the other, thrown back for the full-arm thrust, poised a wicked creese.

Shaken for an instant by the force with which he had been flung to the ground, Bob, dazed, was robbed of any power of resistance; then, in a flash, his arm shot up, and his fingers locked in a desperate grip around the descend-

ing wrist. With a quick wrench he freed his body from the other's weight—and, each hugged in the other's arms, they rolled over and over upon the sand, straining, their muscles cracking, their breath coming in quick, panting gasps.

Again and again Bob's fingers slipped and his grip loosened on his assailant's naked, oily skin; and each time, with an inarticulate cry of anticipated triumph, the other raised the short, curved, ugly blade for a final downward stab—only to smother the cry in a snarl of baffled rage, as Bob, sometimes wriggling, sometimes with a fierce short-arm jab into his face, managed to evade the blow.

The other was the stronger, the more powerful, and Bob, realizing it as the little black eyes, glittering with a mad, inhuman light, glared into his own, laughed outright, bitterly, with a choking laugh. So this was the end—of himself and the professor. He was clinging now with all his strength to the other's arm—if he could gain possession of the weapon there might be a chance. Then a groan escaped him, again his hold had slipped—and now he seemed at his opponent's mercy. The steellike grip at his throat, that he could no longer shake off, grew tighter, robbing him of his senses, his breath, his strength. The other had risen to his knees, and one of them was planted upon Bob's chest. Up went the yellow-brown arm, and again the shrill cry of triumph. This time it was sure. The lunge was made like lightning. Blindly Bob put out his hand, and struggled with all his remaining strength to tear himself from beneath the other. And then, quick and sudden as doom, came the end. His opponent, for the instant unstably balanced, pitched forward from the combined force of his own blow and the movement of Bob's body, that caused his knee to slip, sliding under him to the ground, and his el-

bow, striking violently upon the sand, turned the creese thrust full into his own body.

Not a sound, save Bob's gasping breath. The naked limbs, sprawled across his knees, quivered spasmodically—and were still. A minute passed before he raised himself to a sitting posture; another, and he stood shakily upon his feet, looking down in the faint moonlight upon the dead, distorted features of the man with the tight-drawn skin, the close-shaved head, who, that afternoon, had come to the hut.

He shivered as though a chill had struck through to his marrow, wet his lips with his tongue, and passed his hand again and again across his forehead. His eyes swept around him apprehensively—and lighted upon the raft. At that he started, glanced again with a shudder at the motionless form stretched at his feet, and then, running, in frantic haste now, carried the leaf-wrapped packages and the water gourds to the raft.

He shoved it from the beach, wading after it until the water reached well to his knees, then he clambered aboard, seized the bamboo, and began to pole desperately, with all his strength, out toward the open sea. Soon it grew too deep, and he crouched down upon the grating, weak, exhausted, and moaning; presently he slept.

The night breeze, off shore, catching the pitiful, makeshift sail, added to the drift of the now ebbing tide, and the queer craft, lifting sluggishly with the long, undulating roll of the sea, crept slowly from the land.

CHAPTER II.

AN ASTOUNDING CRIME.

THE ice tinkled with a low, musical note against the glass as Marters' fingers toyed idly with the tumbler on the little taboret between himself and his right-hand neighbor. His "hand"

was down, and he watched his partner's play with an expert's attention, the flicker of a smile hovering around the corners of his mouth, while occasionally his eyes, lighting whimsically, rested on one or another of his opponents' faces.

It was the nightly rubber of bridge in the famous turret chamber of the New York Athenæum Club—that little round projection that sticks out, medieval fashion, over Fifth Avenue, from the second story of the club's magnificent home.

Bridge was one of Marters' hobbies, and one that he cultivated almost as assiduously as he did that other one that had made the name of Richard Marters, millionaire clubman though he was, one to conjure with among men of the secret service and the police departments of many lands—his hobby for criminology. Scotland Yard knew him, the *Bureau de Sûreté*, in Paris, knew him; and he was no stranger to a little, up-ended, bristling-mustached, uniformed gentleman in Berlin, who stood very near to the august person of his kaiser. Washington, perhaps, knew him best of all—that is, officially; otherwise, it knew him as a rare, but charming addition to the brilliant social functions of the capital.

Athletic, broad-shouldered, tall, clean shaven, black hair, black eyes, his bearing inspired confidence in a marked degree. His features, from the high, white forehead to the strong, almost assertive, jaw, spoke eloquently of tremendous latent power, of keen-brained intellect behind the calm, impassive, undisturbed serenity of his habitual expression. An American gentleman, simple, cultured, modest, he stood for the highest example of that type his country is proud to point to to-day and call—son.

Six of the thirteen tricks remained to be played. Marters rose from his chair, and, walking over to the window, stood, with his hands behind his back,

staring down the Avenue at the converging lines of electric arcs, beneath which the broad asphalt pavement took on a somber sheen.

A bus passed, clattering and swaying, its top unoccupied save for a lonely, and apparently intimate, couple on the rear seat. There was nothing much else in sight—it was the usual staid quiet of upper Fifth Avenue in the late evening. Under the window, drawn up in line by the curb in front of the club's cross-street entrance, was a string of taxis and several private automobiles belonging to the members, among them Marters' own closed car.

Diagonally across on the west side of the Avenue a man had halted at the edge of the sidewalk. Marters' eyes rested on the figure for a moment, then his glance passed on down the Avenue to where, a few stores below, another man, lurching from side to side, was making precarious progress in an up-town direction. Marters' lips tightened in a grim little smile, while his shoulders lifted in an almost imperceptible shrug; it was common enough, the sight. His eyes came back to the man on the corner, who appeared in some way to be at a loss, uncertain, undecided, as, walking from one edge of the pavement to the other, he peered, now up and down the cross street, now at the buildings around him. Marters was pulling meditatively at his cigar.

The lurching figure drew closer to the other, and suddenly the man on the corner, as though discovering another's presence for the first time, turned quickly and took a step forward—only to draw instantly back, presumably at the further discovery of the man's condition, and resume a position on the curb under the arc light. Here, for an instant, as he raised his head, the light played upon his face, and Marters caught an indistinct picture of a bearded, mustached countenance, over which a soft felt hat was pulled well

below the eyes. By this time the convivial one had passed the other, crossed the street, and was keeping on up the Avenue.

"I think the odd at sixteen gives it to us." It was Parsons' voice, laughing.

Marters turned at his partner's words.

"Rather an unfortunate double, Hemsley," he smiled at one of his opponents. "Hard luck, old man. A double finesse following the fifth lead would have turned the odd your way. That's as curious a set of hands as I ever saw; they're worth remembering. You had the four, seven, and knave of clubs. You played the knave—well, so would I. I think most men would."

Hemsley rippled the deck as he collected the cards, and laughed.

"Oh, well, that's only one rubber. Cut, Parsons. And, Marters, you can get your check book ready; it's going to go hard with you this time."

They played through the first hand, and then, just as Marters was preparing to deal for the second one a neatly uniformed club attendant came into the room.

"I beg pardon, Mr. Marters," he said, extending the card tray he carried, "but this is for you, sir."

Marters leaned back in his chair, and took the envelope from the tray.

The man moved respectfully back a pace, and waited.

"There is an answer?" asked Marters quickly, glancing at him.

"Yes, sir."

With an apology to his companions, Marters tore open the envelope, took out the card that was inclosed, and hastily read the few words that were scribbled on it—"For Thornley's sake, come." At sight of the words his face, trained to immobility as it was, hardened and set. He turned sharply to the attendant.

"Where did this come from?" he demanded.

"Your man, James, sir."

"James!"

"Yes, sir; he gave it to the doorman, and asked that it be sent to you at once."

"Very well," said Marters briefly; then, swinging abruptly upon the others: "I'm awfully sorry, but I shall have to go. No"—as they interrupted—"you'd better scour around and get some one else to take my hand; I hardly think I shall be back. Good night"—he was already at the door. "Good night," he said again, and smiled, as, with a chorused, good-natured grumble of three voices ringing in his ears, he passed down the hall and entered the elevator.

On the street floor, he walked quickly through the lounging room and across the lobby to the entrance. The doorman handed him his hat. Marters took it with a courteous word of thanks, and stepped out under the portico.

James was waiting for him.

"Well, James," he said quietly, "this is rather an unusual proceeding. Who gave you the note?"

"Yes, sir; it is. I was afraid you wouldn't be pleased, sir. But he would have it, and he begged so hard that I gave in and let him have his own way."

"Um-m, quite so. Perhaps, however, I shall be better able to judge whether I'm pleased or not when you tell me who 'he' is, where he is, and what precisely has happened."

Marters stepped a few paces away from the door, and drew James beside him against the wall.

"I will, sir," said James hastily. "He's up there by the car, sir. I don't know who he is. You know you told me to come for you early, sir. Well, sir, I got here maybe fifteen minutes ago, and, after a spell, as I was sitting on the driver's seat, waiting, a man stepped up to the edge of the sidewalk

and asked if that was your car. I said yes; then he asked me to take a note into the club for you. I told him all he had to do was to leave it at the door. Then he says: 'I can't do that, and it's extremely important,' he says. I asked him why he couldn't, as well as me, but he just kept on saying he couldn't, and how important it was; so, after a bit sir, when I saw he was dead in earnest, I did it. I waited at the door, not knowing whether you'd come or not. I hope I've done right, sir."

"You've done perfectly right, James," said Marters briskly. "Now, where is the car?"

"At the head of the line, sir."

"Well, go ahead then."

They walked quickly along the half block, past the string of taxicabs and machines, and halted beside a large, closed-body touring car. James was staring around in perplexity. No one was in sight.

"Lord, Mr. Marters, sir," he exclaimed, "that's queer, I——"

Marters had moved abruptly to the front of the car and leaned in by the steering gear.

There was the faint click of a switch, and the interior of the car was suddenly filled with light, as the two electric bulbs, with which the car was equipped, were turned on. Through the plate-glass front appeared the head and shoulders of a man whose body was crouched back on the rear cushions—it was the bearded, mustached man, with the soft felt hat pulled far over his eyes, that Marters had seen on the corner from the window of the club!

The man, with a startled exclamation, jerked himself forward in his seat, and then his voice, low, guarded, but full of terrified entreaty, reached Marters' ears:

"For God's sake, Mr. Marters, turn out that light!"

Marters, without comment, switched

off the lights, straightened up, and, whispering a few words to James, who, in the meantime, had opened the door, he stepped inside, and seated himself beside the stranger.

James cranked the machine, and, with hardly a jolt, the smooth-running car started into motion. For a moment there was silence; then Marters spoke:

"The appeal you sent me was one that I could not very well—er—ignore. You were certain of my attention at any time or place. Why have you adopted this rather peculiar and round-about method of securing it?"

"For the sake of safety—yours as well as mine," replied the man quickly.

"Really!" said Marters quietly. "Precaution I could understand, but why the element of safety? Thornley, the last I knew of him, was off globe-trotting. Aren't you exaggerating?"

"I wish to God I were!" The words came tense and vibrant. The stranger turned and laid his hands on Marters' sleeve. "Globe-trotting, you said. Well, call it what you like. He's still in the Far East, and he's in desperate peril—almost as desperate as mine is here. You've known what it is to take your life in your hands and feel the cold dread that comes from the thought that every five minutes your life is nothing more than a ghastly reprieve; you've known what that is for a little while—but weeks of it comes to be *hell!* It's horrible, the awful desire to take your *own* life, and end it all, that creeps insidiously into your blood. Do you believe in auto-suggestion? Do you believe a man could be murdered by preying upon his mind until he takes his own life? Do you? Tell me."

"You are unnerved, wrought up," Marters answered in cool, steady, reassuring tones. "I can fully appreciate what you mean, though; but, if I am to be of any service to either you or Thornley, you must compose yourself."

The man laughed uneasily.

"My name is Paxley," he said. "Perhaps Thornley has spoken of me?"

"No," replied Marters thoughtfully.

"Well, it doesn't matter. I thought perhaps he had. The story goes back a long way—a mighty long way. You're something of a connoisseur of precious stones, Mr. Marters, aren't you?"

"I could hardly claim to be that," Marters said. "I've always been interested in them as a study."

"A long way back, the story goes," Paxley repeated with the same uneasy laugh. "Back to Kúblai Khan's—why are we stopping? What place is this?" Paxley sat suddenly bolt upright, and both hands grasped Marters' arm spasmodically as the car swung in toward the curb, slowing down.

"My apartments," explained Marters. "We can talk here without fear——"

"No, no, no," interrupted Paxley fiercely. "Not there! I might as well not have come, if it were known that there was anything between us. Don't you understand? It is for that very reason I have acted as I have."

The man was unquestionably wrought up, and, too, to that unhealthy pitch verging on hysteria, where argument or contradiction could have no other effect than to precipitate a crisis. There was but one thing to do, and that was to humor him.

"Very well," agreed Marters. "What do you propose? Your own rooms, if you live here—or your hotel, if you don't?"

"I haven't any rooms nor any hotel," said Paxley. "You'll understand when I've had a chance to explain. But a hotel, yes"—eagerly—"any one you like." And then, a little wistfully: "Could you arrange to stay the night there, Mr. Marters? It would be very late when I've told you all of Thornley's story—and my own. I've no possible right to ask this of you, except in

Thornley's name, but—but I wish you would."

Marters hesitated a moment as the car stopped.

"Very well, I will," he decided. "But while I'm here I'll change into tweeds for the morning. You won't mind waiting?"

"It's mighty good of you," said Paxley gratefully. "No, I don't mind waiting. I'm quite sure no one saw me get into the car, and it's natural enough for it to be standing in front of your own apartment."

"Quite so. I will only be a few minutes." Marters opened the door, and stepped to the sidewalk. A quick glance up and down showed a deserted street. "Wait, James," he ordered tersely, and, crossing the pavement, entered the vestibule of the Thorndyke, where he had his apartments.

His rooms were on the ground floor, and, letting himself in with his key, he passed rapidly down the hall to his dressing room. Here he proceeded to make a rapid change of toilet, and, as he dressed, his eyes rested frequently on Paxley's card, which he had laid upon the dresser.

"Um-m, queer game. Queer kind of a devil, that Paxley," he commented, knotting his cravat. "It—er—looks as though it might prove interesting. The man's in a blue funk. Um-m, well, well, we'll see."

He slipped on his coat and vest, turned off the light, and retraced his steps to the street, carrying the small traveling bag that James always kept packed for emergency use. He crossed the pavement briskly. The door of the car was open, as he had left it, and, with his foot on the step, he leaned in to deposit his bag—and then, iron-nerved as he was, he sprang back with an involuntary cry. The seat was empty, but on the floor lay a dark, huddled, motionless heap.

"What's wrong, sir?" James had clambered quickly from his seat.

Marters did not answer. He was already inside, bending over the body, lifting the head, feeling for the heart-beat; the man was dead.

"Good Lord, sir, what's wrong?" repeated James anxiously. "Shall I switch on the lights, sir?"

"Yes." Marters' voice was cold as steel. "Hurry!"

"Yes, sir." James fumbled for the switch, turned it, and went back to the door.

Marters straightened up, laid the body back, and looked grimly at his man.

James' eyes were set, and every trace of color had left his face as he stared into the car.

"My God, sir," he mumbled in a trembling whisper, "*that's not the same man!*"

CHAPTER III.

AN ANCIENT CLEW.

MARTERS' face was cold, expressionless, in direct antithesis to that of James. Between the two lay the body. The features, upturned under the lights, were those of a young man not more than twenty-five at the outside; the cheeks were drawn and a trifle hollow, the face smooth shaven. In the corner where it had rolled, half crushed as though it had been stepped or fallen upon, was a black derby hat.

"Well, James," said Marters quietly, "what light can you throw on this?"

"Lord, sir, none," James burst out, and then, with a shudder: "It's ghastly, sir!"

"Um-m. Why did you leave the car while I was in the apartment?"

"I didn't, sir. Not for a second. I never left my seat."

Marters bent over and pointed to the dead man's shirt—he had opened the vest—to where on the left side, one over the heart and the other a few

inches below, were two fresh clots of blood.

"Stabbed, sir?" ventured James.

"No," said Marters grimly. "Shot."

"Shot!" stammered James. "It can't be, sir. How could it? I'd have heard it, and as it is I never heard a sound."

"You are positive of that, James?"

"Yes, sir, I'm positive. There was an automobile passed while you were inside, and I hadn't shut off the engine; it was going all the time, just as it is now, but I shouldn't think that would drown the noise of a shot."

"Two shots, James," corrected Marters. "Um-m, quite so. Hardly. But you could *feel*, James. You could have felt a struggle going on inside from the swaying of the car. Was there anything of that kind?"

"Well, sir, now you speak of it, there was a bit of a jolt once, sir. But I didn't think anything of it. 'Twasn't anything more than would come naturally enough by one moving a bit to settle into a more comfortable position in their seat."

"Anybody on the street? Anybody pass on the sidewalk?"

"No, sir; apart from the automobile, I didn't see anything or anybody while you were in the apartments, sir. But, of course, sir"—in inspiration—"I was facing downtown all the time."

"The car door was open," said Marters musingly, more to himself than aloud. "Um-m, yes, just so."

"Yes, sir," said James. "You left it open, sir, when you stepped out. If it weren't for seeing it with my own eyes, sir, I wouldn't believe it. How did this man get here into the car murdered, and where's the man that we took from the club? And me sitting not two feet away, sir, all the time! There's something awful about it, sir. It—it ain't human. Would you say, sir, that the first one murdered this one, and then ran away?"

Marters was bending down over the body again—and he did not answer.

James mopped his face nervously.

Marters' hands were searching the dead man's pockets deftly. There was neither money nor pocketbook nor papers of any description about him. The man's identity, so far as any clew from such a source was concerned, was, if anything, more of a mystery than ever. Twice Marters leaned very close to the man's face, each time using a small pocket magnifying glass. Finally he picked up the derby hat and examined it closely, turning his back to James as he did so.

"Clever!" he muttered, replacing it in the corner. "Diabolically clever!"

"What did you say, sir?" James, overcoming his awe, had crowded in a little closer.

"Nothing, James, nothing. Switch off the lights." Marters stepped to the pavement and closed the carriage door behind him. "You may take the car down to headquarters and turn it over to the police," he said crisply. "You'll find Inspector Howells there. Tell him exactly what has happened as far as you know it, and say that I will be glad to see him as soon as he can come up."

"Ye-es, sir," said James a little doubtfully, as, with evident reluctance, he climbed into his seat. "You—you are not coming, sir?"

"Headquarters, James," said Marters sharply. "You heard what I said. Now go."

Without further protest, James obeyed. For a moment Marters stood at the edge of the curb, his eyes fixed speculatively on the car as it rolled away; then he turned and walked quickly into the Thorndyke and entered his rooms.

In his library he switched on the shaded lamp on his reading table, took off his coat, procured his dressing jacket from the bedroom, and drawing

up an armchair to the table stretched himself out in it.

Five minutes, ten minutes passed. He sat there as motionless as a statue of stone, the lower half of his face cupped in his left hand. Suddenly he sat upright, the set expression on his face relaxed, and a grim smile came.

He got up from his chair and went to the bookcases. Here, from a half dozen different sets of encyclopedias, he selected volume after volume and carried them to the table. He sat down again and began to read. One by one each volume was discarded and pushed aside. The slight frown of annoyance that had begun to gather on his face deepened.

Again he went to the shelves and selected another series. This time, after a further twenty minutes of study, he appeared to meet with more success, for he suddenly pushed his chair back, and, with a satisfied smile, got up and began to pace the room.

The little clock over the fireplace chimed a single mellow note. Marters glanced quickly in that direction. Half past one. James had been gone fully two hours. He should have been back with Howells by now. Another ten minutes went by, and then footsteps sounded in the hall outside. James had evidently used his key. Without waiting for the knock, Marters crossed the room and opened the door.

"Ah, Howells," he said as the heavy form of the chief of the detective bureau bulked in the doorway, "you've been a little longer than I expected. Quite—er—an interesting case. James, you may retire; I shall not need you any more to-night. Come in, Howells."

Howells, visibly excited, did not wait to reach the chair Marters indicated before he was well into the subject.

"If the story James tells isn't garbled, it beats anything in the annals of crime that I know anything about," he burst out. "It's unbelievable! It's ab-

solutely impossible! One man gets out of a closed motor car, fires two shots, kills, and places his victim back in the car, and all within the space of less than five minutes, with a chauffeur on the seat all the time who neither sees nor hears anything. Could any one be expected to believe that?"

Marters shoved a box of cigars hospitably across the table, and dropped into a chair facing the inspector.

"I am afraid, Howells," he said coolly, "that either you or James has been making demands, to a slight extent at least, upon your imagination. It is quite true that the man I drove from the club was a heavily bearded, mustached man, with a soft felt hat—the clothes, apart from the fact that they were dark, I know nothing about, since at no time did I see more than his head and shoulders in the light. It is equally true that the man I found dead between the seats would—er—as you know, hardly answer that description, and the hat on the floor beside him was a derby instead of a soft felt. But that the first got out, found the second conveniently to hand, murdered him, and then deposited the body in the car, is, you'll pardon my saying so, Howells, a theory that—er—I must disclaim the honor of advancing."

Howells rubbed the tip of his nose vigorously with the knuckle of his forefinger.

"There isn't much of a *theory* about it at all, is there, considering the facts you state?" demanded Howells, a touch of asperity in his tones. "What other explanation could there be? The whole thing sounds an impossibility, anyhow. Take those shots now; it's absurd to——"

"They were fired, weren't they?" interrupted Marters softly.

"Fired!" Howells laughed grimly. "Yes, they were fired right enough—enough to kill the man instantly."

"Quite so." Marters nodded pleas-

antly. "You have implicit faith in James' integrity, and you know that his hearing is not affected?"

"Yes. What are you driving at? That's just what I can't understand—that he heard nothing."

"Exactly. Yet, taking into account the very few minutes during which we know the murder must have been committed, it is certain that the shots were fired close to where the car stood, if not actually within it. In other words, not out of earshot. They were *not* heard. Leaving James out of the question, I could not have failed to have heard two gun or revolver shots myself, even while in here."

Howells dragged viciously at his cigar.

"That's what I said, wasn't it? And the man's dead with two bullet holes in him."

Marters smiled.

"Eliminating firearms, Howells," he drawled, "since, obviously, they are not to be considered, would—er—an air gun or an air cane appeal to you as offering a satisfactory solution? Weapons of that description, though not in common use, have at least reached the stage of repeating arms, and two or three bullets, as you doubtless know, successively and separately introduced, can be discharged by one mass of condensed air."

"By George!" ejaculated Howells, starting forward in his chair. "Of course! I'm several kinds of a first-class fool not to have thought of that."

"Um-m—er—quite so," murmured Marters gently. "I should say we were warranted then in considering that problem solved. It is a step, naturally, but hardly one that we can expect will aid us materially in getting at the bottom of the affair. You will agree, Howells, that, both from the events preceding it and the peculiar conditions under which the murder itself was committed, we are face to face with a

startling and cunningly planned crime. That it was premeditated shows on the face of it, and this is substantiated by Paxley's mental state when——"

"Paxley! Who is Paxley?" interrupted Howells.

"Paxley is the man I drove over from the club in my car—the man who sent me the appeal in Thornley's name."

"Oh! James didn't mention any names; I suppose he didn't know them. And Thornley—he's not the New York Thornley, is he? The beetle-hunting chap with the lank face and goggles that's forever delivering lectures for the museum, is he?"

"My friend Thornley would be flattered at your description, Howells," said Marters dryly. "That, however, is the man. I might say for your information that he is generally referred to as—er—a naturalist, and a very eminent one at that. Here is the note that Paxley sent me."

Marters took the card from his vest pocket, and handed it across the table to Howells.

Howells reddened as he returned it.

"No offense, Mr. Marters, I'm sure. I didn't know he was a friend of yours."

"I took none, Howells," smiled Marters. "You will understand now why I came to accompany Paxley."

"It's a queer business, Mr. Marters, and it seems to get queerer the farther you go. The whole affair seems to center around Thornley. I should say that the first thing to do was to try and get hold of him at once."

"That was done yesterday—without success."

"Yesterday! Why——"

"In quite another connection, Howells. Thornley is a friend of mine, a very close friend, perhaps the closest and most intimate friend I have. As you know, I am only recently back from a year abroad, and yesterday I started to look him up. I knew, of course, that

he had gone on a trip quite a while before I left for mine; but, as he was never in the habit of remaining away more than a year at a time, I rather expected to find him back in New York. In that, however, I was disappointed. I went to Peelson & Co., his bankers. I found them greatly concerned about him, as the last word they had from him was six months ago from Singapore. Inquiries at the museum and among his acquaintances at the club were equally fruitless. Nothing had been heard from him for months—until that note to-night, which, naturally, under the circumstances, only increased my anxiety."

"Yes; but Paxley—didn't he say anything?"

"I am sorry to say he did not," Marters answered slowly. "That is, nothing definite. Only that Thornley was still in the Far East and in desperate peril. The greater part of the short drive from the club was occupied in calming him into a condition that approached something like coherency. The man was suffering from a bad attack of nerves. He told me his name and that he, too, was in constant peril. He had just given me a hint of his story proper when we stopped outside the house here. He refused to come in for the same reason that had induced him to adopt a roundabout way of reaching me at the club—expressed great fear at any connection with me being discovered, you understand? I must confess that I did not perhaps take his fears as seriously as I should."

"It looks to me then as though we were pretty well up against a blank wall," growled Howells. "There's only one move to make—and I'll do it now." Howells jumped from his seat and went over to the telephone. "If that description James gave of Paxley is anywhere near right I'll have every officer and plain-clothes man in the city on the watch for him in the next hour."

2BThrill

"The phone is at your disposal, Howells, of course," said Marters quietly with a shrug of his shoulders; "but—it would be quite useless."

Howells turned sharply around, his hand on the receiver.

"What do you mean, Mr. Marters?" he jerked out.

"Exactly what I said," returned Marters imperturbably. "Such a course would be absolutely useless. We'll get to that in a minute, but first——"

"Ah!" exclaimed Howells, coming quickly back to his chair. "You've picked up the scent, eh?"

"Rather an ancient one, I'm afraid, Howells," replied Marters with a curious smile.

"Ancient! It can't be very ancient."

"It is a matter of degree, Howells. This one is—er—some six hundred-odd years old."

Howells' jaw dropped, and he stared at Marters as though the latter had suddenly gone insane; then his features relaxed, and he laughed with a rather evident effort to infuse genuineness into his mirth.

"Of course you'll have your joke; but I'm hanged if I see it," said he.

"On the contrary," returned Marters seriously, "I am prepared to say that it is anything but a joke, and, unless I am far astray, has a very vital bearing on the murder that has been committed to-night. Have you ever heard of Kùblai Khan, Howells?"

Howells shook his head.

"There's too many damned foreigners to try to keep track of them. I don't remember him; maybe his picture is in the 'gallery.'"

"I hardly think so, Howells." Marters' eyes twinkled mischievously. "Kùblai Khan was grand khan of the Mongols from 1259 to 1294, and, I might add, has the distinction of having reigned over an extent of territory the like of which had never before, and has

never since, been governed by any one monarch."

Howells scowled.

"I don't see what that has to do with your friend Thornley nor Paxley nor what's happened to-night," he snapped ungraciously.

"I was somewhat puzzled myself," said Marters composedly. "I told you that Paxley barely began to tell his story proper. He had just put a question to me in reference to precious stones, and followed it up by stating that the story went back a long time. 'Back to Kùblai Khan's'—to use his own words. What, of Kùblai Khan's, he referred to was the question. Presumably a gem of some description; and, if so, then one of no little importance."

Howells leaned forward expectantly.

Marters waved his hand at the volumes stacked in little piles and scattered here and there over the table.

"I was about to give up in despair that my library would yield any results"—he smiled whimsically—"only at the last to be rewarded in a most astounding fashion." He picked up the volume that lay face down and open upon the table. "Listen, Howells. I'll read it to you. 'The greatest ruby ever heard of was possessed by the king of Ceylon, which, according to Marco Polo, was a span in length, as thick as a man's arm, and without a flaw. Kùblai Khan sent an ambassador to demand this ruby, offering the value of a city as its price; but the Ceylonese monarch refused to sell it.'"

"Great Jupiter!" exclaimed Howells. "That's the limit. It's about as hard to swallow as the rest of this affair."

"It is quite authentic," said Marters coolly, pushing the book toward Howells. "You may read it for yourself."

"No, no; that part is all right. But imagine a ruby that size! It must be worth something fabulous."

"Yes," agreed Marters. "Unques-

tionably. Though you must not—er—make the mistake of applying New York real-estate values of to-day to a city, so-called, of the thirteenth century. The extract ends with the statement that what became of the ruby is not known. History has handed down to us quite a voluminous record of the founder of the Yuèn dynasty, Kùblai Khan, and we learn that he was a gentleman somewhat used to having his own way, and one, moreover, not always hampered by scruples in—er—getting it. It is not hard to trace the ruby in the first stage of its history, starting with its possession by the king of Ceylon. If our friend Kùblai Khan wanted it badly enough to offer the price he did and couldn't buy, it would not be taxing our imagination any to assume that he resorted to the simple expedient of helping himself. From that point, however, my dear Howells, we are unfortunately in the dark. Hence, you see, our clew is decidedly ancient. If we could follow the ruby from the time of Kùblai Khan down to the present moment, there would be little of mystery in what has occurred to-night."

Howells resorted to his favorite habit of rubbing his nose with the knuckle of his forefinger, and whistled softly under his breath.

"That's a pretty large order, isn't it, Mr. Marters?"

"Yes," said Marters seriously. "Literally, of course, it is not to be thought of, though it really supplies us with a *modus operandi*."

"And that is?"

"To find Thornley."

"You are going after him?"

"Exactly, Howells. I believe I am fully justified in saying that it is imperative, if this mystery is to be cleared up; though, I confess, I should hardly feel that I was called upon to do so if it were not for my personal concern and anxiety for Thornley."

Howells sat silent for a moment.

"By Jove, I believe you're right!" he burst out suddenly. "Thornley being down there in the Far East, besides not having been heard from, kind of dovetails in, doesn't it? I think we'll catch the actual murderer up here all right, but evidently that's only a small part of the game. You were going to say something about Paxley, the uselessness of sending out his description and— Hello, what the deuce is that?"

A motor car, from what had presumably been a high rate of speed, came to a sudden stop with a crunch and clash of brakes, and was now chugging discordantly outside in front of the apartment. A moment later Marters' bell rang two or three times with impatient persistency.

Marters rose quickly from his chair, crossed the room, went out into the hall to the outer door, and threw it open. A policeman saluted, and stepped hastily inside.

"Inspector Howells, sir," he said hurriedly. "He's wanted at once."

"Very good," replied Marters. "Ho, Howells!"

"What is it, officer?" demanded Howells, joining the other two in the hall.

"Strike riot on the lower East Side, inspector," answered the officer, saluting again. "They sent me up with a car from the central office."

"Right!" cried Howells briskly, reaching for his hat on the hall stand. "I'll be with you in a jiffy." He turned to Marters as the policeman went out. "We'll have to leave the rest of this business until morning, but I think I'll send out a description of Paxley."

"Suit yourself, Howells," replied Marters good-naturedly as he accompanied the inspector out to the car. "I suppose you'll have your own way in any event."

Howells tumbled hurriedly into his

seat, and, leaning over, extended his hand.

"Good night," he said. "You won't be off on that Eastern trip without giving me all that's up your sleeve, will you?"

"You'll hear from me," Marters called back as the machine moved forward, "but in the meantime, Howells, you—er—*might try that derby hat on the dead man's head.* Good night."

CHAPTER IV.

A VOLUNTEER ALLY.

MARTERS had very little sleep that night, for, after Howells, had come the deluge in the shape of a half dozen reporters, and, late as the hour then was, another was consumed before they were satisfied with his polite refusal to say anything was final. But, punctual to the minute, at his habitual hour, half past eight, he entered the breakfast room of his apartment the next morning, immaculate as ever in his well-cut tweeds, clean shaved, and looking as fresh as though he had had the benefit of a good night's rest. He nodded to James as he came in.

"Good morning, James," he said briskly.

James' customary imperturbability for once was lacking. He fumbled a little clumsily with Marters' chair as he drew it back from the table, and it was very evident that his polite "good morning, sir," in return was far from being the sum total of what he desired to say. James, however, was very well acquainted with his master, and, as he watched Marters reach for his letters, he choked his verbal tendencies in a fairly plausible, if somewhat perfunctory, clearing of his throat.

Marters glanced at his man quizzically, and went on slitting the envelopes with the little ivory cutter that, as regularly as the mail itself, was always laid beside his plate. Cards, so-

cial invitations, the usual quota of tradesmen's offerings, personal letters—he worked into them leisurely as he attacked his grapefruit, each in turn as they came. Halfway through the pile he came upon the formal announcement of his reelection to the board of governors of the club. A coveted honor to most men, Marters put it aside with a little smile of patient resignation, and picked up the next letter. It bore the highly ornate and embossed coat of arms of New York's most famous hostelry—the Hotel Calfontein.

He extracted the folded sheet, smoothed it out on the cloth—and then his eyes contracted and grew hard. He reached suddenly for the envelope, and examined the postmark. It bore that day's date—September 18th—and was stamped "6 a. m."

Marters' eyes went back to the letter. It was written in the distinctive, legible hand so peculiar to the average Englishman, though here and there a scratched word or slur indicated either hasty or nervous composition—perhaps both. Marters read it again slowly, the same hard gleam in his eyes, his lips setting grimly, tightly closed. It ran:

DEAR MR. MARTERS: What I did last night, God knows, I did only in self-defense. It was his life or mine, and the horror of shedding human blood is less heavy upon me both for that reason and because the danger and fear in which I have been living are now removed. If, in anything I may have said to you, I caused you alarm for Professor Thornley's safety, you may now rest assured that the—here the words "death of" had been crossed out and "fatal outcome" substituted—fatal outcome of last night frees him as it has freed me.

I trust that you will hold me justified not only in what I have done, but also in my determination to evade the police on account of it. I realize that without any proof to support my plea of self-defense I should be in grave danger of the death sentence, or, escaping that, would unquestionably have to face a long term of imprisonment—a punishment I do not merit.

I have entered this hotel to write and send you these lines. I felt that this—the word "confession" was substituted for "explanation"—confession was due to you. I shall have gone when you receive it. PAXLEY.

Marters' lips drooped downward as he finished. He frowned, pushed back his chair, and stared out of the window. For a moment he sat motionless, then he drew up to the table again, and turned suddenly to James, who was arranging the table appointments.

"Ah James"—Marters' face had cleared, the look of concentration giving way to a little pucker around the corners of his eyes—"you may bring the coffee and rolls, and—er—if you are quite through with it, the morning paper."

James reddened and coughed behind his hand.

"I—I beg pardon, sir," he stammered. "I did take the liberty, sir, this morning, on account of last night. I'll bring it at once, sir. I hope, sir, you'll——"

"Yes, quite so, James. I quite understand."

"Thank you, sir. What with being a participant, so to speak, sir, in the awful affair—yes, sir, at once."

James was back with the paper in a moment, and, spreading it out before him, Marters' eye quickly caught the featured article.

MURDERED IN A PRIVATE CAR.

**Mysterious and Astounding Crime
Has No Precedent.**

**Police Are Baffled. No Clue to
Victim's Identity.**

Marters skimmed through the two columns of "story" rapidly. In the main, boiled down and freed from the newspaper fever of theory, assumptions, possibilities, and first-aid suggestions to the police, it was a fairly authentic account of the crime. It was a "good story," even if he had refused to supply any details. He smiled at

the thought—and then whistled low under his breath. His eye had caught the headings of another column.

EARLY MORNING RIOT ON EAST SIDE.

Police in Pitched Battle with Strikers.
Chief Inspector Howells Hurt.

This time there was no skimming. Marters read the account carefully, to the last word. Howells had been struck on the head with a missile of some sort, inflicting a bad scalp wound, which, though not necessarily dangerous, was serious enough to cause anxiety. He had been picked up unconscious and carried to Gouverneur Hospital.

Marters laid down the paper with a grave face, broke a roll, buttered it, and, as he ate, sipped mechanically at his coffee. Howells' injury, of course, could have no connection with the murder of a few hours before, but it had come at a most inopportune time. Perhaps, however—— He rose from his chair and went to the telephone.

"Hello," he said, when he had got his connection with the hospital, "this is Mr. Richard Marters speaking. I wish to inquire about Inspector Howells. . . . Yes. . . . Resting comfortably. . . . I am glad to hear that. . . . Yes. . . . Would I be permitted to see him? . . . What? . . . Not even for a few minutes? It is very important, and I am leaving the city this afternoon. . . . Um-m, no one, eh? For two or three days. You are quite positive about that? . . . Well, thank you. Good-by." He hung up the receiver and swung around. "Well, James?" he said sharply.

James, with a napkin poised in one hand and a plate in the other, was standing like a statue beside the table.

"We are going away, sir?"

"No, James."

"You are going away, sir?"

"Yes, James."

"Then—then there'll be the packing to do, if you'll say what you'd like, sir."

Marters had moved to the window, and was drumming in a preoccupied manner with his fingers on the sill.

James coughed.

"A steamer trunk, James, the lightest of tweeds, and a hand bag. You may take the runabout at once and go downtown and secure a stateroom for me for San Francisco. Look up the different lines and take the fastest—leaving this afternoon, you understand?"

"Right, sir. Very good, sir; San Francisco."

"And, James, you need not put up the car on your return, for I shall have a letter for Inspector Howells which you will deliver at the hospital with instructions that it be given to him as soon as his condition will permit."

"Yes, sir," said James, still fidgeting with the napkin, "yes, sir; and, speaking of Mr. Howells, I was hoping, sir, if I may be so bold as to say it, that you'd see your way clear to take up this case here, seeing it's come a bit close home, sir, and being——"

"If I am not mistaken, James," said Marters quietly, "the bell is ringing. I am not at home to any one."

"Yes, sir; no, sir," said James hastily, and as hastily went out of the room.

Marters turned from the window, walked into his study, sat down at his desk, and, pulling a sheaf of paper toward him, began to write. He had barely started, however, when James appeared with a card. Marters looked up with a frown.

"He wouldn't take no for an answer, sir. He says it's a matter of vital importance."

"About what?" inquired Marters, taking the card.

"He wouldn't say, sir. Just that he must see you. He looks like a gentleman, sir."

Marters read the neatly engraved

card—"Theodore H. Wilder." The name meant nothing to him. He twisted the card between his fingers, still frowning.

"Well, show him in, James," he said finally.

With an impatient gesture of annoyance, Marters turned over the sheet upon which he had begun to write, and leaned back in his chair. He heard the exchange of a few words from the hall, and then through the doorway and across the room toward him a man advanced rapidly. Marters scrutinized him sharply. The man's hair was a tawny brown, the eyes light, the face looked old, the skin a little shriveled, a little wrinkled and of a yellowish hue—a man of fifty, Marters marked him for. Marters' eyes swept the tall, slim-built, well-groomed figure in a single embracing glance—as James had said, the visitor had every appearance of the gentleman.

"Mr. Marters?" The voice was a deep bass, though free from any unpleasant harshness; the words were almost impatiently spoken.

Marters had risen from his seat, and, as he acknowledged his identity, courteously waved the other to a chair.

Wilder took it, and began to pull off his gloves.

"I have forced myself upon you in a manner that under ordinary circumstances would be unpardonable," he said quickly. "It is in relation to the murder committed in your car last night."

Marters made a slight inclination of his head.

Wilder had drawn off one of his gloves, and now, with an impulsive movement, suddenly slapped his bare hand upon the desk. The skin, like that of his face, was slightly shriveled, and the hue, too, was yellowish.

Marters picked up the other's card suggestively.

"You—er—have some reason to be

interested, Mr. Wilder?" he asked quietly.

Wilder leaned forward with a jerk.

"I should think I had!" he cried. "*The murdered man was my brother.*"

"How do you know he was?"

Wilder started, and looked quickly at Marters.

"How do I——"

"Exactly," interrupted Marters. "How do you know he was? Where, how, and under what circumstances have you been able to identify the dead man? In other words, how did you see him?"

"At the morgue."

"Um-m. And is it—er—a custom of yours, Mr. Wilder, to pay early morning visits to the morgue?"

Wilder's eyes met Marters' in a swift, probing glance, as though trying to reach to the depths of the other's mind, then he laughed strainedly.

"I see what you mean, Mr. Marters. I would hardly be likely to have found him haphazard—an unknown victim."

"Precisely," Marters commented.

Wilder played with his glove.

"The explanation is simple enough," he said after a moment's silence. "I am an Englishman. A month ago—I was then in London—I received a letter from my brother. This in itself was unusual, for in the last four or five years I have not heard from him twice—and previous to this letter not for two years. He was a confirmed wanderer. An engineer by profession—mining engineer, you understand? The letter was written in a curious, unhealthy strain, almost morbid. He begged me to meet him without fail in New York on the evening of the seventeenth of this month, naming the New American Hotel as a rendezvous. In his letter he made several references to a stone that was worth a king's ransom; I couldn't quite understand whether he already had it or only hoped to get possession of it. I sailed from

England a little over a week ago, landed in Boston, and came on here yesterday evening. My brother was not at the hotel, nor did he come there. Owing to the peculiar insistence of his letter and its tone, I grew anxious as the hours passed. I was up early this morning; indeed I hardly slept during the night. I read the account of the murder in the paper. The description of the victim was near enough, close enough, to make it possible that it might be my brother. I went at once to the morgue. That is the story."

"And the letter?" inquired Marters softly. "That was written from where, did you say?"

"I didn't say," answered Wilder a little sharply. "In fact, I do not know."

"Not know?" Marters' eyebrows went up.

"No. It was mailed from some place in the East. I couldn't make out the postmark. A note at the end of his letter said that he was giving it to the captain of a trading schooner to post for him. But where he was when he wrote it I do not know."

"Um-m," said Marters. "It is a most extraordinary story—and your precise reason for coming to me?"

"Because"—Wilder's eyes fixed hard on Marters—"because I believe in my soul that the stone my brother spoke of was the cause of his death. The man that killed him—Paxley, the papers say his name is—rode with you from the club. Did he mention it, say anything about it?"

The finely carved figure in the handle of the paper knife appeared to have fascinated Marters with its exquisite lines. It was a full minute before he spoke.

"The man came to me," he said quietly, "using the name of an old and intimate friend of mine, a Professor Thornley, who, he said, was at present in grave peril somewhere in the Far East. He himself he described as being

also in great and imminent danger. Directly, no mention was made of **any** gem; indirectly, there was—a ruby of enormous size and value."

"I'm right, then," announced Wilder.

"Now, tell me, was anything of the kind found on my brother's person?"

"No."

"Then," said Wilder, "the whole thing is as plain as daylight. My brother had it originally, he was murdered for it, and it was taken from him after his death."

Marters shook his head.

"No," he said with a curious smile, "neither your brother nor the murderer has or had it."

"Then, in Heaven's name," cried Wilder, "where is it? And what does it all mean?"

"That," replied Marters grimly, "is precisely what I propose to find out."

Wilder tapped the desk with little sharp raps of his glove.

"Yes, yes; but how? What do you propose to do?" he demanded harshly.

Again Marters' eyebrows went up; and Wilder sank back in his chair, restraining himself evidently with an effort.

"I beg your pardon," he said in an embarrassed way. "I—I am greatly upset. My brother's horrible death has come as a terrible shock. I wanted, more than anything else, to assure myself that you were personally interested in the case, and to know that every effort would be made to bring the murderer to justice."

"Yes, quite so, Mr. Wilder," was Marters' composed response. "And I can assure you that no effort *will* be spared, either by myself or by the authorities. Personally I shall leave for San Francisco this afternoon."

"San Francisco!"

"And from there to Singapore."

"San Francisco—Singapore!" Wilder strained forward suddenly. "But—but surely you do not expect——"

"On the contrary"—Marters smiled a little and put out his hand deprecatingly—"I do. Also there is another reason, a very vital reason—my friend Thornley."

"Yes, of course," agreed Wilder hastily; "but the connection between the two—my brother's reference to a stone was so vague. Perhaps I have put you on the wrong track by mentioning it at all."

"Oh, no," said Marters. "I—er—decided to go last night."

Wilder got up and began to pace the room.

"But the crime was committed here in New York! The murderer could hardly be in Singapore."

"The murderer is not the prime consideration with me at present," replied Marters dryly.

"I don't understand!" Wilder burst out vehemently. "The man was my brother. On that ground, Mr. Marters, answer me one question. You believe, you have reasons for believing, that the mystery of my brother's death is intimately associated with your friend Thornley, and that the solution lies in finding him?"

"Yes," said Marters.

"And you are determined to go?"

There was a grim droop to Marters' lips as he answered evenly:

"I am quite determined to go."

Wilder paced twice the length of the room, and then halted suddenly before Marters.

"I am not a rich man," he exclaimed; "only moderately well off, but I would spend my last penny to bring the murderer to book. I have heard of you, Mr. Marters—who has not?—and if you have reasons strong enough to take you there, then I shall go, too."

"Um-m. But I leave this afternoon."

"I will leave this afternoon."

"Quite so. And your—er—brother?"

Wilder hesitated a moment, then he said determinedly:

"I can pay a greater tribute to my brother's memory in doing my utmost to track down his assassin than by a simple attendance at his funeral. I shall, of course, see that every suitable arrangement is made for that."

"It—er—possibly may not have occurred to you, Mr. Wilder," remarked Marters suavely, "that I might prefer to go alone."

Wilder started, stared, and then coughed.

"Why—why, no, to be perfectly frank with you, Mr. Marters," he stammered, "it didn't. I—I hope you don't feel that way about it."

Marters rose from his chair.

"No, Mr. Wilder," he said pleasantly, "I do not. Indeed, I may say that the idea appeals to me immensely, and I trust that the arrangement will—er—shall we say?—further the true interests of justice. James, my man, is going downtown in the runabout now to make my reservations, and I would suggest that you accompany him and secure your own at the same time."

"Yes," said Wilder, beginning to draw on his gloves, "yes. That's just the thing."

Marters, with a smile, rang for James, and then walked with Wilder across the room, reaching the door just as James appeared.

"Ah, James," he said as he stepped into the hall, and, looking out, saw the car at the curb, "you are ready, I see. Mr. Wilder will accompany you. Good-by, Mr. Wilder, for the present."

"Good-by, Mr. Marters," responded Wilder heartily. "I will meet you at the train. I am sure you will not regret your decision."

Marters walked slowly back to his desk and sat down.

"Um-m," he muttered. "I hardly think I shall, unless"—he picked up his pen to continue his interrupted letter to Inspector Howells—"unless, Mr. Wilder, I am much mistaken in you."

CHAPTER V.

AT SINGAPORE.

WHETHER Marters was, or was not, mistaken in Wilder the ensuing five weeks of necessarily close companionship that landed them finally in Singapore proved one thing at least, and that conclusively—Wilder could be a most agreeable associate. His inexhaustible fund of anecdote was contagiously humorous, and, moreover, he was a most excellent hand at double dummy.

With Marters the barriers were down from the first, and he met the other's advances in the most genial and open manner. On one subject only did he exhibit any reserve—the murder in the motor car.

It came up at rather frequent intervals, Wilder introducing it by propounding theory and counter theory, always with an interrogation at the end thrown at Marters through the curling smoke of the cigar that was everlastingly between his lips. And always Marters' answer was the same, always given with the same enigmatical smile, the same slight, imperturbable shrug of his shoulders.

"Really, my dear fellow, you must try and be as patient as I am. Our purpose is to find Thornley."

Wilder never pressed the point. He would nod his head with easy nonchalance, allowing the subject to drop temporarily.

But the matter of Thornley's whereabouts, however, was discussed fully, over and over and at length. Marters was at a loss, and freely admitted it. Singapore was the last place Thornley had been heard from, therefore at Singapore they must pick up the trail.

"I am afraid, Wilder," he would admit, "that we shall be hard put to it. A man down in these parts gets out of the way with very little splash."

Here Wilder's face would set.

"If finding Thornley solves my brother's death, by Heaven, we'll find Thornley; that's all there is to that. We came to find him, and we will—if we have to follow him all over the rest of creation!"

"Um-m, yes; quite so—er—I have no doubt we shall. And, do you know, Wilder, it's rather inspiriting to find you so enthusiastic about it."

"Well, I've every reason to be, haven't I?"

Marters' eyebrows would go up.

"Why, assuredly, Wilder; assuredly. And, as I say, it is—er—encouraging to find you that way. I am counting to a large, a very large, extent upon your assistance. In any event let us decide not to borrow trouble; we shall see what we shall see when we reach Singapore."

Marters' summing up of the situation was putting the matter in the best possible light, and it took no more than their first morning in Singapore to evidence the fact that a man, even as well known a man as Professor Thornley might be supposed to be, *could* drop out of the way with very little splash, as Marters had put it. The one concrete point from which to start was Messieurs Hodig and Kelson, the agents of Peelson & Co., Thornley's bankers.

Marters, accompanied by Wilder, called upon them without loss of time on the morning of their arrival.

"*Ach*; but, *mein Gott*, I do not know!" exclaimed Herr Hodig, the senior partner, when, shown into the little, dark office at the rear of the establishment, Marters had stated the object of his visit. Herr Hodig was a very short man with a very large paunch. Certainly he waddled when he walked, and from the flabby rolling of his jowl it might almost be said he waddled when he talked. Bristling, yellow eyebrows covered his little blue eyes, and his head was thin-thatched with a few straw-colored hairs. He

threw out his hands with a gesture that was eloquent of despair. "Der cables have hummed, yes. *Himmel!* I do not know. He was a funny man, Thornley. I think too many stories he listened to did. *Ja!*"

"Yes," said Kelson, the English member of the firm, a nervous little man, breaking in. "Hodig has the right of it, to my mind. It's seven months now, and we haven't seen hide nor hair of him. We've cabled Peelson & Co. again and again to that effect, and, speaking of cables, Mr. Marters, there's one here for you."

He fished the message out of a pigeonhole and handed it to Marters.

Marters tore it open, and smiled as he read it:

Well again. Letter received. Understand hat. Air gun found. No other results.

HOWELLS.

Wilder had leaned, almost imperceptibly, a little nearer; but indifferently, nonchalantly, Marters' fingers were already tearing the cable slip into pieces.

"You were saying, Mr. Kelson," he prompted, "that you had had no word of Thornley for seven months. Mr. Hodig mentioned something about listening to stories—"

"And, as I said, I think that's the right of it," went on Mr. Kelson. "There's all kinds of queer, fantastic yarns traveling around this section of the globe that are well enough to listen to—if you don't take any stock in them. Precisely the sort of thing, I should say, that would appeal to the imagination of a man like Thornley. To make a long story short, the first we ever saw of him was one morning when he entered this office with credentials from Messieurs Peelson & Co. We showed him what attention we could. I should say it was about two weeks after his arrival that he came to us with one of those fantastic tales I mentioned. It was about some very ancient com-

munity of Chinese that were supposed to inhabit an island hidden somewhere in the archipelago, quite out of the regular track of ships. He appeared intensely excited, and, if I may use the expression, no end pleased. We tried to damp his enthusiasm by pointing out that not only were such tales almost invariably myths, but were, moreover, extremely hazardous matters to have any part in unless one was quite sure of his ground. Perhaps our saying so was a mistake; it seemed only to whet his appetite."

"*Ach, Gott, ja!*" interjected Hodig. "To study der beobles und der customs und manners of der goundry."

"I see," said Marters.

"Precisely," continued Kelson. "He said that even the possibility of such a thing was not to be missed. We asked him where he had heard the story, and he said that once before on a visit to the East he had heard of it, and recently again from several different sources among the natives. We asked him, then, how he proposed to go, and he replied that on that point he was not wholly determined. We argued with him for an hour until he became a little angry. After that it was none of our business. He cashed a draft for quite an amount, went out, and that is the last we have seen or heard of him."

"Und den we thought at all he didn't go mebbe," chimed in Hodig. "Der money, you see, dot he might be killed for right here in Singapore. We to the bolice went—nodings!"

Marters was frowning. He answered the German with mechanical politeness.

"I am not surprised that the result was fruitless, Mr. Hodig; but it was a very wise move on your part."

"*Ja,*" said Hodig. "He's eggscentric was. I think he went."

The frown was still on Marters' face as he left the office, and from there to the hotel he walked in silence, saying

nothing to Wilder, who kept step beside him. At the hotel entrance he halted suddenly and turned to his companion.

"Well, what do you make of it?" he demanded.

"Why, of course, he went," said Wilder; "otherwise——"

"Naturally!" Marters interrupted, a little impatiently. "That is not in question. We know that he went. But how—and where?"

Wilder removed his cigar, and blew out a cloud of smoke thoughtfully.

"We ought to be able to find out; I don't imagine the police took a very keen interest in the matter. Too many men drop in here and go away again without leaving their address. He must have gone in a boat or vessel of some sort, simply because he couldn't have gone any other way. There's the water front of both harbors for us to start on."

"Excellent," said Marters heartily. "Excellent, Wilder. We'll divide our forces and start at once."

Two days of utterly unproductive results followed. Marters' face, when comparing notes with Wilder, expressed undisguised disappointment, perplexity, and worry—an expression that became more pronounced as the time went on. Marters grew pessimistic.

Wilder's optimism never faltered. It might take time, but eventually—the wave of his cigar was eloquent of inevitable success.

It was the morning of the third day before anything transpired. Wilder had taken breakfast, and presumably had gone out to prosecute the search. Marters had returned to his room for a few moments, when, answering a knock at the door, he was informed that a gentleman below desired to see him.

"There was no card, no," said the servant. "The gentleman perhaps was not accustomed to cards, but for all that he was a gentleman of very good

appearance. He had given no name, no. His excellency was English, yes. He——"

"Show him up," said Marters, cutting short the flow of eloquence.

A moment later a short, squat-built man came abruptly into the room. He closed the door behind him and stared at Marters.

"You're Mr. Marters, Mr. Richard Marters, I take it," said he.

Marters returned the look before he answered. There was no mistaking the man's occupation. The set of his legs alone bespoke the sailor, to say nothing of the skin on his hands and face, which was browned to the toughness of hide. He had short-cropped black hair and eyes of a color to match. The hang of his jaw resembled a bulldog's.

"I am," acknowledged Marters quietly.

"I'm Sims, Capt'n Sims," announced the other.

Marters waved him to a chair.

"Sit down, captain. What can I do for you?"

Captain Sims took the chair, and laughed a little boisterously.

"You've got it the wrong way round, Mr. Marters. It's what can I do for you?"

Marters smiled.

"Really," he drawled, "I'm sure I don't know."

"Well, then, I'll tell you," said Sims, hitching his chair to the table, upon which he rested his elbows. "I'll tell you. You're looking for a chap named Thornley, so I've heard along the water front."

"Yes," admitted Marters; "that is quite right. Do you know anything about him, captain?"

"Well," said Sims, "that's as it may be, and depending on a consideration. 'Twas me took him on his trip out of here."

Marters' face hardened.

"That's seven months ago," he said sharply. "Do you mean to say that in the face of all the anxiety that has been caused by Professor Thornley's disappearance you have chosen to keep silent—waiting for a consideration?"

"Your tongue's a bit rough, ain't it?" retorted Sims, scowling. "You're laying it on a little thick; better belay a while till you get your course. I ain't no regular excursion liner; I'm a tramp. Seven months ago it is, or thereabouts, and seven months ago it is since I've touched Singapore until yesterday afternoon."

"Oh, I see," said Marters. "And where did you leave Professor Thornley?"

Captain Sims grinned and winked one eye meaningly.

"I've been to sea a considerable long while now," said he, "and one lesson I've learned—keep an eye out for the profits of the owners that feed you. That's the way to get along. I'm light at the moment, and no cargo in sight for a spell. I'll make the trip and back with you, and do it dead cheap."

"Has it occurred to you," Marters demanded coldly, "that it would not be a very difficult matter under the circumstances to *oblige* you, by recourse to the law, to disgorge your information?"

Sims closed his fists wickedly.

"Don't try none of that game with me," he growled. "'Twon't work. A silly fool I'd look, wouldn't I? What's to prevent me naming any one of the few million, more or less, islands in these parts and letting it go at that? 'Twouldn't be my fault, would it, if they didn't find him there? I couldn't help it, could I, if he'd taken a notion to clear out? And I got a crew what pays strict attention to their own business, and knows about as much navigation as a mud shark. Mabbe you get the point?"

"Quite," said Marters with a grim

look. "Your owners are—er—fortunate."

"I came to you fair and square, and open and aboveboard," snapped Captain Sims, allowing Marters' remark to pass with no further acknowledgment than a deeper scowl. "If you want to trade, we'll trade; if you don't, I don't mind telling you I'm about as much interested in the professor as I am in the wriggling little beasties and flies he was forever gassing about—and that ain't much! He can bally well stay where he is and rot for all of me—him, and the young chap along with him."

"He wasn't alone then?" Marters' tones were indifferent.

"No, he wasn't alone. There was a fellow named Wilder along with him."

"Um-m," muttered Marters, and he stared at the captain speculatively. "His name was Wilder, eh?"

"Nothing funny about that, is there?" inquired Sims gruffly. "We're wasting time, ain't we? Three hundred quid's my price—and it's cheap."

"That's fifteen hundred dollars. If it's cheap, it means a pretty long trip."

"Oh, I ain't so close-mouthed as all that," said Sims. "I ain't giving anything away when I say that it'll take a few days, or thereabouts, each way. You can start out in a good many different directions and go a few days, Mr. Marters—without going the right one. Three hundred quid—what say?"

"How do I know you ever saw Professor Thornley in the first place?" demanded Marters coolly. "Three hundred pounds may be cheap, or it may not, but it's quite a little sum to risk, and before coming down to a bargain I'm sure you'll admit that it would be only reasonable on your part to explain that point."

"I'm reasonable enough, I guess you'll find—when others are." Captain Sims' jaw assumed a less protruding angle. "I'm willing enough to tell you that. Right here in this blessed

hotel I met him. The night before I sailed it was, and I'd just dropped in for a look around before going aboard. I'd never clapped eyes on him before till he came up to me and began to talk. Somebody had pointed me out, he said, as a man who'd sailed these parts a good many years. Then he began to ask questions about a certain island"—Sims screwed up one eye, and squinted at Marters—"about a *certain* island that I'd heard of and knew the approximate bearings of, though I'd never been there. The cruise I was taking wasn't more'n a hundred miles or so from where I figured it ought to be, and the upshot of it was that I agreed to land him there if he was willing to pay for it. He about fell over himself at the chance, and packed up his luggage and went aboard with me that night, him and young Wilder. Well, I landed them both all right, the professor agreeing to take his chances about getting back on any trading schooner that might happen to touch there. And for all I knew, until I put in here yesterday and heard about the disturbance his disappearance had caused, that's what he had done. Looks now like he was stuck there."

"I will pay you the three hundred pounds," said Marters abruptly. "When can you start?"

"Whenever you say the word," replied Captain Sims briskly, getting up from his chair. "All you got to do is come aboard. The old scrouger's no palace, but we'll make you as comfortable as possible. Any of the boatmen'll know the *Parona*; she's in the far harbor. When'll you start?"

"Some time this afternoon. As soon as possible."

"Right!" said Sims. "I'll get away now and make ready. We'll fix up that little financial deal when you get aboard. See you this afternoon then, Mr. Marters. Good-by."

"Yes," replied Marters. "Good-by."

As the door closed upon the other, Marters settled back in his chair and locked his hands behind his head. The minutes passed, and he sat there motionless, except for the gradual tightening of the lines around the corners of his mouth. Once his hands loosened, and he reached for a cigar, lighted it, and resumed the old position again. He smoked it to the butt, smoked another, and yet another. Two hours passed, and he made no other movement. Finally he leaned forward, and his fingers played on the table edge.

"I—er—actually think," he murmured, "that I have reached a stage as nearly morbid as I ever have in my life—and I would much better attend to my packing."

This he proceeded to do, and was bending over his trunk when a step sounded outside, followed almost immediately by Wilder's entrance.

"Hello!" exclaimed Wilder. "Packing? What's up? Any luck? I hope you have had—for I haven't."

Marters folded a coat carefully before he looked up.

"Luck, Wilder," he protested whimsically, "is a most indeterminate sort of a thing. Some people don't believe in it at all, you know. Do you?"

"Why, yes, of—oh, I don't know. What's the use of talking about that? What's up?"

"No use at all. Quite right. What's up? Well, I have discovered, or rather he discovered me, the man who says he took Thornley out of Singapore seven months ago."

"By Jove! You don't say!" ejaculated Wilder.

"To some island or other somewhere," continued Marters, "to which he will take us, aboard his steamer, for three hundred pounds."

"Three hundred pounds! That's pretty stiff." Wilder pursed up his lips. "Look here, Marters, I don't know that I can manage my share of that."

Marters laughed.

"Your company, my dear Wilder, a great deal more than counterbalances your share; I would not even consider starting without you."

"Why, thanks, I——"

"Not at all, not at all," interrupted Marters. "But you'd better see to your own trunk, hadn't you? We sail this afternoon."

"Yes, I will. I'll do it at once"—starting for the door.

Marters picked up another coat, and began to fold it with the same particular nicety as the other.

"Oh, by the way, Wilder!"

"Yes?" Wilder turned around in the doorway.

"This Captain Sims says that a young man by the name of Wilder was with Thornley."

"My brother! You were right when you said that everything hinged on finding Thornley. The question now is: Who is Paxley?"

"Um-m, quite so. It—er—*depends* on who Paxley is."

"It what? Why, that's what I said!"

"Precisely," smiled Marters.

For a moment Wilder stared hard at Marters, and then, with a shrug of his shoulders, he turned and went out of the room.

CHAPTER VI.

THE GOD'S EYE.

THE *Parona* was not a pretty boat, and certainly, as her commander had said, no palace. She was squat and shovel-nosed at the bows, and low in the waist. Her deck houses were all aft, and that, with her shortened overhang, gave her the appearance of having been robbed of more than one foot of length by her thrifty builders on the ways; likewise, they had not been overgenerous in the matter of beam. The rusty plates and the wheezy engines, that swayed perilously on their bed-plates, were aftermaths, and concerned

more the underwriters—which may have had some bearing on Captain Sims' inability to see any cargo in sight in the near and immediate future—insurance is sometimes to be considered in figuring rates.

She was villainously dirty, and she carried a crew that was equally villainous, both as to dirt and looks—Chinese to a man, barring the captain himself, a mate who had never "passed," and an engineer who was addicted to drink.

The weather she might be expected to make in any kind of a blow would justify cowardice in a brave man; the weather she did make as she grunted her way up the South China and into the Celebes Sea was something to wonder at. She rolled mightily in the long, smooth swells—and the arc of her roll was amazing.

The days passed with a sort of sullen stubbornness. No breeze—just torrid heat that bubbled the pitch in the deck seams.

Forward, the crew chattered and squabbled interminably; aft, Marters played double dummy apathetically with Wilder, or cultivated the ungracious, hard-visaged Sims—but most of all he cultivated MacWhitten, the engineer.

Here he was apparently much more successful than with the skipper. MacWhitten, besides being a man of drink, was a man of many sorrows, and, withal, much aggrieved with life. Marters was possessed of infinite sympathy—and did not hesitate to express it. From the gold lace of a chief on the P. and O. to unclean duck trousers and, at times, a shirt, to say nothing of watch on watch in a foreshortened, sweltering hell hole of an engine room, taking his sleep with the hope that nothing would happen before he woke up, was enough to disgruntle any man—whatever the cause. And, after two months of it, a man is to be judged

leniently. He was a recent acquisition to the *Parona*.

MacWhitten said nothing about drink. He said it was a private matter between himself and the last captain he had had the misfortune to sail with, and who was a "low swine."

"It's the P. and O.'s loss, curse 'em!" said MacWhitten to Marters on the sixth night out, by which time their friendship had reached the intimate stage. "It's their loss. I'm a better man than any they've got." His tones were entirely devoid of conceit; he spoke as one speaks of the obvious, and jerked his pipestem down the engine-room hatch, pointing his remark. "Is there one of 'em, tell me that, one of 'em, that could make head or tail of you, let alone make it *go*?"

Marters looked at the crazy, squeaking, groaning scrap heap of flying steel, and shook his head.

"MacWhitten," said he, "it's pretty rough, isn't it?"

"Aye," said MacWhitten, "it is. But it's comfortin' at times to run into a man that has sense enough to give a chap a pat on the back, and keep his mouth shut when he knows the other is lying. What may have possessed ye to come aboard is beyond me, but I'll say this, it's a godsend to me that ye came, and if there's ever a time, which ain't likely, when old broken MacWhitten, meaning myself, can do you a good turn, MacWhitten'll do it."

"Yes," said Marters half gravely, half smilingly, "I believe you would. And one never knows, MacWhitten."

"They do not," said MacWhitten. "If ye'll excuse me, I'll be going below, for I'm thinking I'm needed."

Marters watched the engineer disappear, and then, turning, walked slowly aft. He swung around the port side of the deck house, and, in the dark, came suddenly upon Captain Sims and Wilder engaged in animated conversation.

At Marters' approach Sims walked abruptly away.

"He's a surly devil if there ever was one," said Wilder. "We'll be at the island to-morrow morning, he said, and when I started to question him about it, how big it was and all that, he got on his ear, the Lord knows why!"

"Quite so," agreed Marters, "he's not exactly—er—amiable. I hardly suppose we can make any plans until we get there, about going inland and that sort of thing?"

"I've been thinking it over," said Wilder, "and I believe we ought to take some of the crew. Maybe they wouldn't be of much use in case of trouble, but the mere presence of numbers ought to have its effect."

"Yes, I should say so," Marters answered. "But we can tell better in the morning. I'm going to turn in now. Good night."

"Pretty early yet, isn't it? How about a rubber of double dummy?"

"No," said Marters. "I fancy we'll need all the sleep we can get. Good night again."

Marters, however, did not get very much sleep, though he went at once to his stateroom. He sat staring out through the window at the phosphorescent sea until well into the small hours; and when at last he turned in, it was only to be disturbed shortly after sunrise by a hubbub of voices from the forward part of the ship.

He sat up in his bunk. It sounded as though all bedlam had been let loose. Occasionally, over the excited Chinese chatter, sounded Captain Sims' gruff tones, accompanied by an oath. Comparative silence would follow for a few moments, and then the same gabbling chorus would break out again.

Marters dressed hastily and went out on deck. The crew was gathered well forward by the starboard bow, clustered in a knot, gesticulating and crying out to each other, pointing with out-

stretched hands ahead of them. Captain Sims, leaning over the weather cloth of the bridge, his pipe hanging from his lips, was dividing his time by alternately cursing his crew and talking to Wilder on the deck below him.

Wondering, Marters stared ahead. It came like the flash of a heliograph, and then, with the roll of the ship, disappeared. Dead ahead they were rapidly raising an island of considerable size, densely wooded, with two low ranges of hills that seemed to divide it in the center. Again it came, the flash, brilliant, scintillating—and Marters placed it. It appeared to issue from the right, between the hills.

A little curiously, his glance swept over the ship, the crew, Sims and Wilder, back again to the island and the peculiar, fitful beam of light—then he strolled forward to the bridge.

By this time Captain Sims, with flushed, angry face, had descended from the bridge, and was accomplishing with his fists what his tongue had failed to do. From a compact cluster, the crew broke up and dispersed in sullen little groups of twos and threes.

“What’s the trouble, Wilder?” inquired Marters.

“I’m hanged if I know,” Wilder replied. “It was so beastly hot I couldn’t sleep, so I got up a while back. Ever since we caught that flash from the island half an hour ago, just after sunrise, the crew have been acting like maniacs. Anyway, here’s the end of our trip.” He shot a quick glance at Marters.

“Yes, Wilder, I imagine it is,” Marters replied suavely, meeting the look with a smile and a shrug of his shoulders; “but so much depends on Thornley, you know.” Then to Sims, as the captain joined them: “Well, captain, your crew aren’t exactly docile this morning. What’s the matter with them?”

“Damn ’em, I’ll show ’em!” snarled

Sims, mopping his dripping head with the back of his hand and flinging the sweat drops in a little shower to the deck. “The silly swine, it’s that light!”

“I don’t see why that should upset them,” said Marters softly. “You’ve the same crew you had last time you were here—with Thornley—haven’t you? They must have seen it before.”

For a moment Sims glared hard at Marters; then he laughed raucously.

“Of course it’s the same crew,” he snapped. “And they’re doing the same thing over again, same as they did before. They’re scared out of their measly yellow hides. Why? Blamed if I know. They call it the Eye of the God. There’s some sort of superstition about it—about every native in the East seems to know of it, though, I reckon, mighty few of ’em outside this lot here ever saw it. That’s how I first heard of it—talk around the bazaars, if you keep your ears open and know the vernacular—and they think you don’t. That’s how your friend Thornley first picked up the story, I guess.”

“Um-m,” said Marters. “It’s rather curious, though, isn’t it, that it isn’t common property? I should think a good many passing ships would——”

“Would you?” grunted Sims. “Well, now we’re here, I don’t mind showing you the chart any time you care to look at it. You’ll find these parts marked ‘dangerous,’ if you know what that means. Maybe, too, you’ve noticed we haven’t passed many craft in the last two days. Don’t remember sighting any, do you?”

“No,” admitted Marters, “I haven’t seen even one, come to think of it.”

“That’s what,” said Sims. “Europeans keep away from here because it’s no place for navigating, and the natives”—he shrugged significantly—“don’t fancy it overmuch.”

“I see,” said Marters. “But this Eye of the God, as you call it, of course, that’s all——”

"Is it?" Sims waved his hand forward. "Well, clap your eyes on them yellow devils down there; they don't look like they was putting up any bluff about being in earnest, do they? What is it? How do I know? I didn't land with Thornley. Maybe you'll find out. Maybe it's some swell nabob that's annexed a windowpane for his hut—maybe it isn't! What are you going to do?"

"We're going ashore," said Wilder, "if you'll provision a boat for us."

"All right," said Sims. "If that's the game, you'd better eat your breakfasts and get ready. I'll be in as far as I'm going in another hour, maybe less, depending on how fast she shoals."

"Yes, I guess we'd better," agreed Wilder, leading the way aft. "Come on, Marters."

Marters nodded and followed, but stopped for a word with MacWhitten by the engine-room door as he passed. There was a grim smile on his face as he entered the saloon a bare minute after Wilder.

The captain's "hour" was a scant thirty minutes, and both Marters and Wilder were still at their meal when the erratic throb of the engines slowed to a scarcely perceptible sound—and then stopped. An instant later came the splash of the anchor and the rattle of the chain as it paid out through the hawse pipe. Followed the captain's bellow in a series of orders, and the scuffle of pattering feet along the deck.

Wilder rose quickly to his feet and dived into his stateroom off the saloon. He came out again in a minute, and Marters, rising leisurely, followed him on deck.

Leaning against the rail, wiping his hands on a piece of waste was MacWhitten. Marters pressed the engineer's elbow as he went by, and, without looking around, kept on up the deck to where Sims and a half dozen of the crew were gathered about the

after port cutter. She was already outboard, swinging from the davits, and the captain, with his fists in his pockets, was glowering at his men. He turned to Wilder and Marters as they came up.

"There's two days' grub aboard her"—he jerked his right fist from his pocket and his thumb at the cutter—"if you can row. There's not one of these devils will put a foot in her."

"Really!" drawled Marters. "You might have let us know."

"Let you know!" bawled Sims angrily. "How was I to——" He stopped suddenly.

Marters laughed softly.

"I thought perhaps you might have had the same difficulty in landing Thornley. However, it's no matter—they're a queer sort, the Chinese. You never can tell what they'll do. Well, Wilder, I suppose we're going just the same, eh?"

Wilder looked from Marters to Captain Sims and back again.

"Yes; oh, yes," he said uneasily.

"Good!" said Marters briskly. "Clamber in, then."

Wilder, a little awkwardly, mounted the rail and climbed into the bow of the boat.

"Center seat, Wilder, please, if you don't mind," smiled Marters.

"He's all right where he is," interposed Sims. "You'll want to be one at each end for lowering away."

Marters backed to the rail and leaned toward Wilder.

"I'm sure you'll oblige me, Wilder," he said significantly.

Wilder hesitated a moment, and then moved slowly aft.

"Look here, you pair of asses," stormed Sims, "didn't I tell——"

"Now, MacWhitten," cut in Marters quietly, "if you'll take the bow, we'll make a start."

There was a dry chuckle from the engineer, who had edged up close to Marters, and the next instant he was

standing in the bow with the tackle falls in his hands.

Marters, at the same moment, had snatched at the after falls, sprung into the stern, and both men had begun to lower away before Captain Sims' expression of blank amazement had given place to one of towering rage.

"What kind of a game is this?" he yelled. "You, there, MacWhitten, on board here with you and lively, or I'll show you what's o'clock!"

"What's the—the meaning of this, Marters?" Wilder stammered, rising.

"Sit down, Wilder," said Marters coolly. "Mr. MacWhitten has kindly consented to accompany us."

"He has, eh!" bawled the skipper, who had jumped onto the ship's rail, and, hanging to the davit, was stamping his feet in impotent rage. "He has, eh? D'ye hear me, MacWhitten? Belay on that fall and come back, or it'll be the worse for you."

"I'm thinking I'll go," replied MacWhitten, gazing calmly upward as he continued to lower away.

Captain Sims burst into a torrent of profanity that would have brought the blush of shame to the cheeks of a forecastle parrot. He cut it short off to turn his attention to Marters, as the cutter dropped into the water and Marters and the engineer unhooked the falls.

"I'll hold you responsible for this," he screamed. "You're putting my ship in jeopardy, by the eternal!"

Wilder, beginning to recover from his astonishment, eyed Marters, if not sourly, at least with distinct disapproval.

"This is rather high-handed, isn't it?" he said sharply. "I can't see any reason for antagonizing Captain Sims. If he doesn't want the man to go, we've no right to take him."

Marters' voice was velvet in its softness as he answered:

"Really, Wilder, I am afraid you—

er—will have to let me be the judge of that. MacWhitten, can you ship the oars?"

"Aye," said the engineer, and, grinning, he waved one at his irate commander. "Man, but you're a blasphemous character," he called out.

"I'll show you, you forsaken greaser!" shrieked Sims, shaking his fist. Then he turned again on Marters. "You're at the bottom of this, you are, and I give you fair warning you'll answer for it, and the safety of the ship. I'm helpless, I am, to budge her an inch with no engineer."

"That," said Marters, as, under MacWhitten's powerful stroke, the cutter shot away from the *Parona's* side, "that, Captain Sims, is exactly the idea."

CHAPTER VII.

MARTERS CHANGES FRONT.

THE half-mile pull from the ship was made in silence—once Captain Sims' raucous shouts were lost in the distance. The flashes of light seen farther out at sea were now no longer visible, nor, indeed, had they been, even from the *Parona's* deck, after the ship had rounded the headland that made the eastern extremity of the island.

As they approached the shore, Marters stood up and scanned the long reaches of white, gleaming beach that stretched out on either hand. There was no sign of human life—nothing but a dark background of heavy wood, that rose in a gradual slope inland. Slightly to the right the foliage seemed to merge with the water line, indicating, perhaps, an inlet.

Marters steered for this, and, running closely in, discovered it to be a creek, that, with the flooding tide, was deep enough to float the cutter. It narrowed rapidly, however, as they went up, until, hardly a hundred yards from the open, MacWhitten could no longer use his oars. Overhead the

trees almost arched, forming a cool and sheltered glade.

"I fancy we are rather fortunate in striking this," said Marters, looking around. "It makes a most excellent hiding place—a thing that may prove—er—desirable before we're through." He smiled grimly. "Shove her nose in, MacWhitten, and we'll drag her out of sight among the trees."

This was quickly done, the boat being carried well in, until it was completely concealed in the foliage.

"Now," said Marters briskly, "I suppose there's a village of some sort, and I suppose it must be on the other side of the island, or, at least, inland. We'd better strike straight through the woods. You, MacWhitten, you've got a pocket compass, you lead the way. You next, Wilder. I'll bring up the rear."

"And then what?" demanded Wilder a little sullenly.

Marters shrugged his shoulders.

"I haven't the faintest idea, Wilder, really. We can keep under cover and reconnoiter."

"Well, I don't like it!" snapped Wilder. "I didn't when we started off."

"You mean since MacWhitten here made one of the party?" asked Marters coolly.

"No, I don't mean anything of the kind," replied Wilder shortly. "I mean that three can't do much—I figured we'd have a lot of the crew to back us up."

"It is your misfortune, then, Wilder." Marters' face hardened, and his eyes narrowed. "Personally I am inclined to think that the smaller our number the better are our chances of rescuing Thornley, and less the danger of discovery. Sooner or later naturally the ship out there at anchor is bound to be seen; but so far I do not believe that our presence on the island is known. I can quite understand, however, that, from your standpoint, a well-armed party would not be amiss; or, perhaps,

still better, a smaller one even than we comprise—say, just you and I?"

Wilder started violently, and a tinge of gray crept into his cheeks.

"Just you and I?" he repeated numbly.

"Just you and I," said Marters softly. "It would be better here, easier, less to answer for—that was the chance I took, Wilder. The chance that you would wait."

Wilder laughed nervously.

"You're talking very strangely, Marters. I don't know what you mean."

MacWhitten had come closer to the two men, staring curiously from one to the other.

"It's none of my business," said he; "but I'm thinking we're wasting a good deal of time that we could be putting in looking for this here Thornley."

"MacWhitten is right," declared Marters calmly. "Lead on, MacWhitten. And you, Wilder"—Marters' voice grew stern and cold—"the walk will give you an opportunity of refreshing your memory on the events of the past few weeks."

For a moment Wilder hesitated, his eyes fixed on Marters with a half-frightened, half-tigerish gleam in their depths; then again he laughed.

"I've always heard you were clever, Marters," he sneered. "You are. You are so clever that, I confess, I haven't the faintest notion what you are driving at." He turned abruptly, and, motioning to the engineer to proceed, stepped out after him.

Marters, with no other answer than the tightening of his lips, fell in behind.

The going was hard—the ground was rough and treacherously covered with innumerable creepers; the trees so thick and the branches so closely interwoven that, often enough, the three men made progress by no more than a bare few inches at a time. Once, after half an hour, they paused for a rest, their faces

flushed, the perspiration running from them freely; then on again, preserving what caution they could, and as noiselessly as the conditions would permit; thankful that, here and there, the forest was a little more open for a few yards, affording, as it did, an occasional momentary breathing spell.

Another half hour passed; and then, just as they started across one of the clearer spaces, Wilder, catching his foot, stumbled and pitched headlong to his face. He rolled over, attempted to get up, and fell back with a groan.

MacWhitten, at the crash, had come back, and, with Marters, stood over Wilder, who now, with distorted face, struggled into a sitting posture, and grasped his ankle.

"I'm afraid it's got a pretty nasty twist," he grimaced.

MacWhitten pursed his lips and gave vent to a low whistle of consternation.

"Here's a pretty go!" he muttered.

Marters bent quickly to unlace Wilder's boot.

Wilder pushed him back. "Each of you take an arm," he said, "and maybe I can walk it off. If you loosen my boot I'll never get it on again."

They helped him to his feet, and for a step or two he limped forward; then, groaning again, slid down between them to the ground.

"It's no use," he said. "You two had better leave me here and go on and see what's ahead. By the time you get back perhaps I'll be all right; and, at least, you'll know then what's best to be done."

"The idea is a very good one," agreed Marters composedly; "but one will be enough to carry it out. We can't be very far from the place where that light showed coming in. You go on, MacWhitten, and see what you can find out. Don't show yourself, for there's no telling what kind of a reception you'd get, though I imagine you wouldn't have to complain of any lack

of warmth if the inhabitants are anything like the rest of their brethren in these parts. I'll stay here with Wilder."

"There's no sense in that," objected Wilder querulously. "You can't do me any good by staying."

"Um-m. Possibly not, Wilder. Nevertheless, it seems best to me. I—er—really couldn't think of leaving you alone."

"You're getting damned solicitous about my welfare all of a sudden!" growled Wilder.

"On the contrary," said Marters steadily, "I am much less so than I have ever been." He turned to the engineer. "The sooner you go, MacWhitten, the sooner you'll be back. Be careful!"

"Right!" said MacWhitten tersely, and the next instant he had disappeared among the trees.

With a snarl, Wilder twisted around and glared at Marters.

"What did you mean by that?" he flung out.

"Precisely what I said," returned Marters imperturbably. "Your usefulness is—er—really at an end. I think you will agree with me that I no longer require the services of—a guide. Your ankle is better, quite better, is it not? Rather foolish, Wilder, that play. Where would you go? Back to the ship? And the ship? Have you forgotten Captain Sims' chagrin at the temporary loss of his engineer? Or did you think your chances a little better alone? I am in a curious frame of mind, Wilder, am I not?"

"You've come to the wrong shop, then, to satisfy it," answered Wilder with an indifferent air. "I've told you before I don't know what you're driving at."

Marters laughed shortly.

"From your—er—accident, Wilder, you appear eager to force the issue. Well, for my part, I am content—as well now as any other time. Shall we go back to the night of the murder, or,

rather, the morning following, when you had the astounding temerity to call at my apartment? Of course you did not know—how, indeed, could you?—that what you believed to be your *coup d'état* in cleverness was, in reality, from the outset, your undoing. I refer to your identification of the body. Unfortunately for you, the murdered man had told me his name—and it was not Wilder."

"He told you his name!" jeered Wilder. "That's a lie, on the face of it, Marters. Do you think you can take me in like that? Why, you never saw him until you found him dead between the seats of your car!"

"You paid me the compliment a little while ago, sarcastically, it is true, but none the less the compliment of being clever," said Marters evenly. "I return it now, in all sincerity. You are diabolically clever, Wilder. It was the cleverest piece of work I have ever known. And yet, in one respect, it is no exception to every other case that has come within my knowledge. I've often wondered at it, too. Clever and ingenious to a degree as may be the criminal's method of covering his tracks, in some one point he always fails. Take your case, for instance, Wilder; it apparently did not occur to you that your head and the murdered man's were not the same size. Curious little oversight, wasn't it?"

Wilder's face was ashen, but he said no word.

Marters eyed him with a cold, critical stare.

"I said that the murdered man had told me his name. If you had the slightest suspicion that I knew who he was you would never have written that letter you signed 'Paxley,' would you, Wilder? Shall I reconstruct the crime and its motives for you? The lure of a ruby—ah, yes, we both know that it is a ruby—led you on. In some way, I do not know how yet, you met Pax-

ley, learned of its existence, and, further, that it was here upon this island. To preserve this information, that was worth a fortune, for yourself alone, to prevent his giving it to any one else, you threatened him, cowed him, until to escape you he took to a disguise. He was no match for you in cleverness, Wilder. You discovered him, saw him enter my car at the club, and—I hazard this as a guess—you rode clinging behind the car to my rooms."

Wilder was eying Marters now with a fascinated gaze. His lips twitched a little, and the hand upon which he leaned the weight of his body as he sat upon the ground was tightly clenched.

"The door of the car was open." Marters' eyelids were half-closed, almost hiding his eyes, his tones, in grim contrast to his stern set features, were like a child's reciting a lesson. "No one was in sight. James, my man, was on the driver's seat, his back naturally to the body of the car. No sound, no noise, no disturbance, and yet within the space of less than five minutes of time a man is shot to death, his body apparently deposited in the car, and the previous occupant vanishes. Incredible, unbelievable, impossible—and yet, let us see. There is nothing on earth that is not capable of explanation. The shots are easily explained. The solution suggests itself at once—an air gun; which, for your information, Wilder, I might add, has been found, so Inspector Howells cabled me. An automobile passed, and the engine of my car was still running—that would drown the noise occasioned by the air-chamber release. You stole around the door and fired twice. Your victim was not even aware of your presence before he had fallen in a huddled heap—dead.

"But the rest—either we are dealing with the superhuman or else— The clothes unfortunately afforded no help. I had seen him only in the dark, except

at the moment I had looked at him through the glass front when I switched on the lights in front of the club, and then I had seen only to his shoulders—a bearded, mustached man, wearing a soft felt hat. But we do not believe overmuch in the superhuman these days, Wilder; we have become too skeptical. A pocket magnifying glass supplied the solution—the traces of paste upon the dead man's skin, where the false hair had been affixed. And then the hat, the derby, instead of the soft felt—the idea was magnificent; it amounts to positive genius. It *was* genius—it ignored details. If the hat had fitted the victim the traces of paste would not have been conclusive—I should have been obliged almost to believe in the superhuman. Ah, Wilder, if your heads had only been the same, or nearly the same, size!"

"Curse you!" snarled Wilder suddenly through livid lips. "If I'd known, you'd never have left the ship alive! I was a fool to wait, anyhow."

"You are digressing," said Marters. "We can now picture the crime as it was perpetrated in detail. Crouched low, bent close to the curb, protected by the darkness and the body of the car from James' sight, you fired twice. Death was instantaneous, and the body slid to the floor between the seats. You reached in, snatched away the false beard and mustache, threw your own hat into the corner, took your victim's, and ran. Did you throw away your weapon some time during the night, or did you drop it unintentionally? Howells did not say where it was found."

Wilder did not answer. He was crouched back on the ground now; smaller he seemed, as though in some curious way he had drawn into himself.

"Well, it is of little consequence," said Marters. "The letter purporting to be from Paxley, which I received

the next morning, was, then, obviously false. Paxley, dead, could hardly be the author of ingenious epistles—and, shall I say in passing, that many times since then I have had the opportunity of identifying it as your handwriting, even as I have had the opportunity of discovering that, curiously enough, the crushed derby hat would fit you to a nicety? Your visit was as obviously a lie. Your determination to accompany me East, after I had taken pains that you should know that I had an inkling of the existence of a mysterious gem, was alone almost sufficient evidence of your guilt—it stood for some impelling motive that was vital enough to have prompted the deed of the night before. Why you came to me at all, Wilder, makes an interesting psychological study. Primarily, to ascertain if, after all, you had committed murder in vain; if you alone possessed the secret of this ruby, that, so far, neither you nor I have seen. Secondly, for your own protection; both by an effort to obtain information, and by actually using me as a shield behind which to shelter yourself.

"You determined to accompany me, not only to prevent my getting the stone, but to use me as a means of financing the expedition, if I may call it that, from Singapore. And, further, so that when you were through with me, I might, under very favorable conditions—to you—be done away with. Are you becoming tired, Wilder? Your ankle—is it your ankle that bothers you? We are reviewing our very interesting and—er—unique companionship at length; but I am almost through. I was useful—you used me; but you, too, were useful to me, Wilder; and I needed you, though I knew you were Paxley's murderer that morning. I knew that if you committed the murder you had more than a mere superficial knowledge of the existence of the stone. Where that was Thornley was. I

wanted you to take me there. You have.

"In Singapore, my task was easier than yours; I had only to wait until the agent you chose approached me. That reprobate, Sims, I have no doubt, was very well satisfied to pocket three hundred pounds for repeating like a parrot the lesson you taught him, and making the trip here. That would have been a neat touch, calling Thornley's companion Wilder—if I hadn't known! The unexpected action of the crew upset your plans a little, I am afraid, Wilder. That brings us down to this morning. You will appreciate the fact—indeed, it is almost an insult to your intelligence to mention it—that I had no fear of Captain Sims leaving *you*. You will appreciate, too, the compliment I paid your fertility of resource when I took steps to be equally sure that you and he together would not leave *me*. It is quite true that, once ashore with you alone, or practically alone, being forewarned, I had little to fear—but contingencies, Wilder, are something that only the foolish man ignores."

Wilder had edged a little on his side, facing Marters. All trace of the veneer and polish that had masked his face for many weeks was gone. Now the expression was one of savage hate, and, too, fear. The skin, whitened beneath the tan, was a sickly pallor—the muscles twitched convulsively.

Marters studied him for a moment, his own strong face reliant, calm, possessed.

"It is an incongruous situation isn't it, Wilder?" he said whimsically. "You and I here, many thousands of miles from the scene of your brutal crime, on an island that we know nothing of, facing a future that, to a very large extent, is problematical. Your ankle, I notice, is much less painful. We have still a moment left. MacWhitten is not yet back. I have been very frank

with you. Will you tell me where you met Paxley, and how you learned his story?"

"Yes—in *eternity!*" With a movement quick as a panther's spring Wilder was on his feet, and his revolver, whipped in a flash from his pocket, covered Marters.

"You cursed bloodhound!" he cried hoarsely, his eyes blazing in wild triumph. "I'll do now what I should have done long ago. You took me for a crawling, frightened fool, did you—to play with at your mercy! If I had time I'd play with *you* before I kill you."

Marters had not moved. Four yards away from the other he stood, his eyes fixed steadily on Wilder's, a cold smile on his lips.

"You are mistaken, Wilder," he said softly; "you will not kill me. And there are three very good reasons, if you will have the patience to listen to me, why you should not even *fire*. First, the report of the shot would bring the inhabitants down upon us. Second, provided you did kill me, sooner or later you would have to face MacWhitten—the *Parona* cannot leave the island without him—and I hardly think he would be satisfied with the explanation that I committed suicide. Third——"

"I've only *one* reason," snarled Wilder viciously, "and that's my own skin. You know too much to live. I'll take my chances on the rest. Good-by, Marters, damn you! Good——"

The roar of the report drowned out the last word. A spiteful tongue of flame from the revolver muzzle cut the air. A thousand noises sang in Marters' ears; his eyes were blinded with the flash.

Came another shot, the thrash of leaves and branches.

Wilder was swaying like a drunken man, his hands reached out gropingly before him. He started to run. A step, two steps, three, he took. His

knees seemed to bend under him. He stared wildly at Marters, who was still standing erect, glanced once fearfully over his shoulder, steadied himself desperately, and plunged forward another foot—then toppled and pitched, crashing, among the trees.

The smoke was still curling from the barrel of MacWhitten's revolver as he sprang toward Marters, his face gray, his eyes staring.

"Are ye bad hit?" he gasped. "I saw the devil fire as I came up, the dirty murderer! If I'd been a second sooner he'd never have fired at all. Man, don't stand there like that; where are you hit?"

"I am not hit at all," said Marters grimly, moving toward Wilder, who lay sprawled, face down, a few feet away.

"Not hit!" cried MacWhitten. "At four yards, and not hit! I reckon from the looks of it, I did better at ten, and I'm not much of a shot; leastways, I never prided myself on it."

Marters knelt quickly beside Wilder.

"Turn him on his back and lift up his head," he said.

The engineer obeyed, and Wilder, with a sigh, opened his eyes. As they fixed on Marters he shuddered.

"Through the hip," said Marters, making a hasty examination. "Rather a bad wound, I am afraid. This would never have happened, Wilder, if you had allowed me to finish. I was about to tell you that I had taken the precaution to remove the bullets from the cartridges in your revolver before you left the ship."

Wilder's lips moved weakly.

"Curse you!" he whispered.

MacWhitten stared at Marters a moment speculatively.

"I'm thinking," said he, "ye need no one to look after ye. He's a pretty card, he is. What's to be done? With those shots we've a fair chance of having the ugliest-looking set of devils I

ever clapped my eyes on down on us. There they are; hark to 'em!"

A chorus of wild, shrill cries rose suddenly, died away, were repeated—and then silence.

"They'll have heard the shots," said MacWhitten again. "What's to be done?"

"Get away," Marters answered grimly, "if they are what you describe them to be."

"They're worse nor that." MacWhitten wagged his head and looked at Wilder. "And him?"

"We'll carry him," said Marters quietly. "Take his legs."

"He deserves to be left," growled the engineer, hesitating. "How far d'ye think we'll get, lugging him?"

"As far as we can," replied Marters tersely; and again: "Take his legs. We'll strike off at an angle to the right."

Together they lifted the wounded man, who had now sunk into unconsciousness, and began to fight their way through the trees. A bare twenty yards they made, and they were forced to lay him down and rest. The chorused shouts had given place to a series of cries, still some distance off, as of a number of men calling to each other to keep in touch as they beat through the bush.

"The village'll be no more than a quarter of a mile away," panted MacWhitten, mopping his dripping forehead; "and a rum-looking thing it is, with a queer, rounded affair like a dome stuck on a bit of a hill in the center, and the huts of the natives around it in a circle. The light we saw standin' in comes from the dome, there's a glass streak running the circumference of it, that reflects the sun, though what the devil it's for is beyond me. 'Twas the rise and fall of the ship shutting off the sight of it that made the flash—the light's steady enough."

Marters nodded, and glanced at Wilder. The man was still unconscious, and the rough handling he had received as they carried him had kept the wound bleeding profusely. Marters opened Wilder's clothes, and, with his handkerchief, attempted to stanch the flow of blood.

"Were you seen, MacWhitten?" he asked.

"I'm not sure," replied the engineer a little dubiously. "The huts are right into the edge of the woods, and I was at the back door, so to speak, of one before I knew it. They was raising hell for fair—little yellow-brown vicious beasts, they looked. I reckon they'd caught sight of the *Parona* out there at anchor. Anyway, whether they saw me or not, those shots have started 'em on the hunt. I started back full speed astern after I'd had a squint. What gets me is that bally affair on the hill; there's a big stockade of bamboo around it, halfway up, and no opening, so far as I could figure out, to get in by. Those devils are getting nearer, ain't they? We'd better mosey, I guess. How about him?"

"I don't know," said Marters. "It depends on the course the bullet took. He is bleeding pretty badly. We'll simply have to do the best we can, and go on."

Again they picked up Wilder, and again struggled forward, only, after another short distance, no longer than the first, to put him down to regain their breath and strength. This time the shouts were not only nearer, but they could hear the snap of twigs and the sweep and rustle of leaves and branches.

"They'll be on both sides as well as behind," said MacWhitten fiercely. "I'm thinking 'twill be a peach of a fight when they catch up to us—as long as it lasts. We're a hot-looking rescue party for that there Thornley, we are, thanks to this beggar's shot and the one

I fired on account of it. But there's one thing I'm mindful of, and that's the idea that if Thornley was ever stuck on this island he's past all rescue long ago."

Marters, without answer, lifted Wilder's head and shoulders, motioning MacWhitten to his share of the burden, and once more they forced their way forward.

The yells came closer—a savage medley of them, and, time after time, gaining but a pitiful distance at each advance, Marters and the engineer, on the verge of exhaustion, were obliged to halt. At the expiration of fifteen minutes, MacWhitten drew his pistol.

"I'll fight it out here," he panted, "while I've a bit of strength left. There's no use going any farther. They've spread out like a fan, the heathen cusses, and they'll get us somewhere, so it might as well be here. By God—they got around in front of us! Ah, I'll get you!"

The bushes had parted just ahead of them, and, framed in the opening, a pair of dark eyes, half hidden by long, tangled strands of matted hair that streamed over them, burned luminously out of thin, sallow cheeks.

MacWhitten's arm, with leveled revolver, flew up, but with a bound Marters knocked the weapon aside.

"Thornley!" he cried.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE RED GOD.

MMARTERS! You!" Thornley's voice was husky, full of glad amazement. It changed suddenly into a quick, fierce-breathed whisper as an outburst of yells louder than before broke with wild ferocity but a few rods away. "Quick! *Quick!* This way!"

There was no time to waste words, no time to question, and neither Marters nor the engineer wasted any. They picked Wilder up, and stumbled for-

ward after Thornley. For five minutes they twisted and turned, following their guide, wriggling under the lower branches, half dragging, half carrying Wilder, forcing their way by brute strength where they could neither crawl nor walk. Suddenly Thornley swerved sharply to the left, whispering encouragement over his shoulder.

"Here we are," he said. "We can give those fellows the slip for the time being, though afterward——"

"Never mind afterward," gritted Marters through his clenched teeth as a veritable pandemonium broke out behind them. "There won't be any 'afterward' in about a minute, unless——"

He stopped. The tall, gaunt form, with the scanty garments, that hung in tattered ribbons around bare legs and shoulders, had vanished.

"Here! This way! Stoop down!" Thornley's voice seemed to come from beneath their feet. "Get down on your knees, Marters, and come in backward. You'll have to slide that man you are carrying in by the shoulders. Turn him around."

Wonderingly, Marters obeyed; and then, to his amazement, in the heart of the thicket, covered by a dense screen of shrubs and foliage, which Thornley was now holding apart, there appeared an opening in the ground about as large around as the thickness of a man's body, from which the naturalist's head and shoulders protruded.

Laying Wilder's feet at the edge of the cavelike aperture, Marters began to work his way in, feet foremost, experiencing a shock of surprise at the ease with which this was accomplished. He found himself lying on some hard, smooth surface that dipped downward in a gentle slope; his feet, guided by Thornley, finding little footholds as he descended. Halfway in, he stopped, and grasped Wilder's legs, while MacWhitten, steadying the unconscious man's shoulders, began to lower him

down. Then Marters resumed the descent. Another two feet, and he felt the level ground beneath him, and then he heard Thornley's voice:

"You can stand up. Pull the man along the ground here away from the opening, so that the other chap can get in."

Marters nodded quickly, and, with Thornley's help, carried Wilder back a few yards, just as MacWhitten, who had evidently projected himself with some haste into the opening, slid, sprawling, at their feet.

It was very dark, the angle of the incline shutting off all but a small segment of light from the opening. Marters stretched out his hands around and above him, and uttered an astonished exclamation. The roof and walls were strongly built of timber; standing upright, there was a bare three inches' play for his head, while in width it was so narrow that his shoulders almost brushed the sides. Then his hand felt for Thornley's, caught and wrung it hard.

Thornley tried to speak, but instead he laughed with a half-choked sob.

"I know, old man," said Marters. "We won't try to say anything now. This is my friend MacWhitten—MacWhitten, I hardly need to say that this is Professor Thornley, whom we came to find."

"I'm thinking," said MacWhitten dryly, "that the finding is on the other foot; but, I'm hanged if I ain't gladder to see you than I thought I'd be. Good Lord, I'm about all in! What's to be done now?"

"Rest for a few minutes and decide," said Thornley, his voice still showing traces of his recent emotion.

"And have 'em piling in hell-pell for election on top of us!" exclaimed MacWhitten.

"They won't pile in yet; we've got a good hour before we need fear anything of that sort," replied Thornley.

"They're not looking for trails; they're simply beating straight through to the shore. Good way to find us if it wasn't for this little convenience. We're in the underground passage leading to the temple."

"D'ye mean that queer thing stickin' up like a sore thumb in the middle of the village?" demanded MacWhitten. "So that's the lay, eh? I wondered how they got into it. You remember me saying so, Mr. Marters?"

Marters was again on his knees beside Wilder. The man was, at least, still alive; but, it seemed, little more. The heartbeat came weak and fluttering, the respiration hardly discernible at all.

"I'm afraid he'll never pull through," said Marters, rising. "The bullet has probably plowed through into the abdomen. What do you mean by having an hour, Thornley? The natives may not have seen us come in here, but they know of this place, don't they?"

"Only the priests; but, anyway, they wouldn't expect *you* to know of it, or me, either, had they the least idea I was with you. They'll beat straight through to the shore, because they have seen the vessel. After that they'll——"

"Pay us a visit on the off chance, eh?" Marters supplied grimly.

"The priests will, yes," Thornley answered. "But it is death for any one else to enter here, except under the conditions that govern the initiation into the priesthood itself, and even then it is taking bigger risks than you or I would care to take knowingly; for the candidate, after having been shown this passage and the other one that opens on the farther side of the Sacred Hill, must enter one or the other at some time, which he himself chooses, between two sunsets—and take his chance. The passages are guarded alternately by the priests. If he chooses the wrong one at the wrong time he meets with what is considered a most honorable death

before he gets very far; if he chooses the unguarded one, and reaches the inner chamber and the presence of the Red God he is safe. That is the law—to see the Red God is to be a priest, and it is sacrilege of the blackest kind to lay hands on him after that unless he himself forfeits his right to immunity."

"If there's any chance of gettin' into the protectin' shadow of that there god, then," said MacWhitten, "it looks like about the best play we can make. I wasn't never cut out for a priest, but I ain't going to be stand-offish on that score, seeing as how I wouldn't figure to officiate overlong."

"You might have to officiate longer than you imagine," said Thornley significantly. "I've had seven months of it. No one who has ever seen the Red God can leave the island alive—an attempt to do so is to forfeit one's immunity." He turned to Marters. "There are two things we may do: Wait a few minutes longer, until they are well past us, and then go out the way we came in; or else go on through this passage into the temple, and out by the other one. I think the latter plan would be the best, for otherwise the natives would still be between us and the shore, and, in coming back, would drive us straight into the village. There, I can promise you, they would show us no mercy, for they are the most bloodthirsty set of devils that ever lived."

"You know best, Thornley," responded Marters quietly. "You probably saw the ship at anchor? Yes? Well, the boat we landed in is just about opposite her, up a little creek, hidden in the woods."

"We can work around to it," said Thornley, "by the other passage, though it's a pretty long way. It will be safer, though, for the temple is deserted now. They had just discovered the ship when you fired those shots, and

it was the priests who raised the village into a swarm of buzzing hornets. The priests were all in the temple at the time, and rushed pell-mell out through the other passage; it's easier getting into the village from that side, you understand? In their excitement, they did not pay any attention to me, and I hid until they had gone; then came out this way, with the idea of getting to the beach and from there, by some means, to the ship."

"Let us go, then," said Marters. "We've got our breath again. You had better lead, Thornley, it——"

"Just a minute," Thornley interposed. "We've time to spare a moment or two yet. How did you find this island; it must have been through Bob."

"Bob?"

"Bob Paxley."

"Yes, Thornley, it was."

"Where is he, then?"

"Paxley is dead," said Marters gravely.

"Dead! How? I don't understand."

"He was murdered for the sake of some ruby——"

"My God!" cried Thornley in a low, horrified voice. "I warned him again and again to say nothing about that. What happened, Marters? Tell me, man! I only know that he escaped from here on a little raft that we both worked a month, at nights, to make out of a ship's grating we found washed ashore—there is not a single boat on the island, you know—and that he must have had a desperate fight to get away, for a native was found on the beach the day following. I was sick, bad, with the fever, when he went."

"It's a long story, Thornley; too long to tell now," replied Marters. "He came to me one night in New York and——"

"I cannot understand," Thornley broke in again. "That, once reaching New York, he should go to you; yes, for I had spoken of you to him often

enough; but New York—how could he get there?"

"That," returned Marters, "I do not know. And I am afraid that the only one who does will never be able to tell us, even if he is willing. I mean this chap Wilder, here, that we've been carrying."

"It was a bad day for me, and worse for poor Bob," said Thornley sadly, speaking more to himself than the others, "when I listened to his tales, and let my enthusiasm get away with my common sense. I had met him down here in the East on a previous trip, and liked him well; he was a promising young scientist, and very clever. A new people, new manners and habits and customs—we should have known better! More piratical, more bloodthirsty, more fiendish than the worst of their kind in the archipelago, that's all. He had heard of the place from a very old man, a dying Malay, that he had befriended once, and, roughly, knew its position. We went to Bulangan, on the East coast of Borneo, and started out with a proa and a crew of Malays. We were fools, of course—worse than that—though we knew nothing of any ruby then, mind you—only queer tales of heathen worship of a god whose eye was brighter than the sun, or something to that effect. The crew deserted us on the island, and sailed away. We stumbled upon the underground opening to the temple—not this one, the other one—before our presence on the island was suspected at all, and we walked full into the priestly company—but, also, into the inner temple. That saved our lives, for we were, *de facto*, priests from that minute. But, having seen the Eye, we must spend our lives here. There wasn't much chance of getting away, for, as I said, there isn't a single boat on the island, and the only visit that is paid it is a strange kind of pilgrimage each year from somewhere in the in-

terior of China—the descendants of Kùblai Khan they claim to be.”

“Ah!” exclaimed Marters. “This eye of the god, then, is the ruby Kùblai Khan stole from the Ceylonese?”

“I don’t know where he got it,” replied Thornley; “but, as nearly as I can make out, from which I know of the language, some of his descendants, when his dynasty was overthrown, fled with it to this island, and it has been here ever since. Certainly, whether there is any truth in that or not, one thing is beyond question—its value is fabulous.”

MacWhitten whistled softly.

“I’ve an idea,” said he, “’twould be worth clapping one’s peepers on; and, likewise, I’m thinking ’twould make a pretty souvenir.”

“If you get away with your life,” said Thornley grimly, “to say nothing of anything else, you’ll have reason to be thankful. We’ll go on now, Marters, if you fully agree with me about trying the other tunnel.”

“I do,” said Marters. “It seems about the only way of getting around the village and skirting back, without being seen. I wish we had some other means of carrying Wilder; apart from the difficulty and strain, it’s killing the man—but there’s nothing else for it, I suppose.”

“It will be easier while we are in here,” said Thornley. “The passage runs perfectly straight, and we can take turns relieving each other.”

“We’ll manage,” chimed in MacWhitten. “Little as he deserves it, and little good as it’s likely to do the poor devil, we’ll manage. Go ahead, professor; and then you can spell Mr. Marters after a bit.”

As Thornley had said, the tunnel ran perfectly straight, but a few steps farther in found them in utter darkness. Even Thornley’s form, hardly two feet in front of Marters, was completely merged in the surrounding blackness.

Their steps, with the drag, almost scuffle, incident to the heavy burden they bore, sounded hollow and unreal. They guided themselves by their shoulders, solely by the sense of touch, rubbing the wall now on one side, now on the other. The silence, apart from the noise of their own footsteps, was intense—felt even as the blackness was felt. It became oppressive, weighing down the spirits—full of that vague, unfathomable sense of the thing intangible, neither understood nor seen, that saps at a man’s courage till the sweat drops break from his forehead, the nerves weaken into a chaotic jangle of discords, and, tugging at his heart, bids him fear. From time to time, they stopped to relieve each other, speaking in low tones, and starting at the sound of their own voices, as it reverberated back to them in muffled, wavering notes. Once, when they halted, MacWhitten swore fiercely under his breath.

“There’s something in this ghastly place that puts the chill into your blood,” he muttered, cursing fervently. “I wish you’d kept that bally yarn to yourself, professor. I can feel a creese between my ribs every step I take.”

“It is not much farther,” answered Thornley briefly. “I’ll take the lead again.”

They went on. An interminable distance, it seemed, endless miles; and then, suddenly, there came, startling, the creak of a door swinging on its hinges, that, low as it was, in the silence was like the report of a volley of small arms. A fresh current of air fanned their faces. The blackness melted, and a soft light, subdued, mellow, that played and rippled, shading from the pale, delicate pink of a rose to the full, rich, glorious red of wine, was around them.

Mechanically, Marters and the engineer laid Wilder down. The door that Thornley had opened swung shut behind them. They were in a high,

vaulted, dome-roofed chamber, circular in shape. Around the walls ugly, repulsive figures of idols leered at them. Above, the dome seemed cleaved in two, admitting a long, thin thread of light, that, playing upon a combination of mirrors, which rose like the converging arms of a great triangle, exactly in the center of the chamber, focused the sun's rays upon an enormous ruby, that lay cushioned upon a carved pedestal of ivory, some five feet in height.

"'A span in length, as thick as a man's arm, and without a flaw'"—the words came unconsciously to Marters' lips. "The ruby for which Kúblai Khan had offered the price of a city!"

He stood spellbound. The gem was like molten fire, shading now light, now dark with every fraction of change in the reflected rays of the sun. It was like gazing into the limitless depths of some wondrously beautiful void, that, scorning measurement, had leaped beyond the boundary of dimension. It seemed a thing of life, full of pulsing fire, radiating its energy in warm, glowing color, flooding the room with marvelous splendor.

Some one plucked at his sleeve. He started. It was MacWhitten. The engineer pointed, in an awe-struck way, at Wilder, who had regained his consciousness, and had risen to his knees. Swaying unsteadily, he was staring, wild-eyed, at the gleaming gem. Marters stepped quickly to him, supporting him by the shoulders.

"It was worth it, eh, Marters; worth it!" whispered Wilder. "Paxley's ruby! Poor devil, Paxley! Picked him up on a raft, so far gone he couldn't speak for two weeks."

Marters looked sharply at the other.

"Wilder," he said solemnly, "you are a dying man. I am not urging any confession, but if it will ease your conscience to make one, you have only a few moments left."

Wilder shivered, lurched—and steadied himself again.

"Yes; I'm—I'm about in. You were right—all you said—I did it. I was on a steamer, bound for San Francisco, when we picked him up. He was very sick—in delirium. The ship's doctor told me he was raving about a wonderful gem. I thought there might be something in it. So, when he began to get better, I got chummy with him. That was easy enough. He had no money—nothing. I gave him some—won his confidence—and wormed the secret—of the ruby—out of him—by degrees." Wilder paused, and leaned heavily against Marters, fighting for his breath. "I couldn't go after it alone. I've been a criminal all my life. I had friends in New York I was going to let into the game. When we got to Frisco, of course, I had to go on to New York. I—I couldn't let Paxley out of sight for—fear he'd tell—others of the stone. I persuaded him to come with—me by promising—to organize expedition for—the professor. We got to New York. I—I think he—had become—suspicious. He spoke—of you—tried to go—to you. I caught—him—and—locked him up. He got away—with—one — of — my — disguises." Again Wilder stopped. A gray pallor was creeping over his face, and a little fleck of white showed on the ashen lips. "I—I found it out—before he'd—gone half an hour." Wilder's voice was very weak. The sentences were coming in catchy whispers. Marters bent his head to catch the words. "Knew he'd—go—to—you. Followed—to—house—then club. Saw man—with—my beard—get into car. Ha, ha, Marters!" Wilder, was incoherent now. "My beard, Marters! I knew—my—own beard." He stiffened and dropped back; then suddenly raised himself convulsively upward, and his voice rang strong in awful mirth:

"I knew my own beard! Why don't

you laugh, Marters? Can't you see the joke, I——"

He fell backward with a gasp—dead.

Marters laid him down, his own face white and drawn.

For a full minute, there was utter silence; and, in the dancing light of the ruby, the grotesque, hideous figures around the walls seemed to grin and mock like incarnate fiends.

"That's horrible!" said MacWhitten hoarsely. "Let's get out of here. I wouldn't have any part of that thing if it were worth the wealth of Asia."

Thornley, with a jerky motion, swept the long strands of hair from his eyes; his face was stern, set in hard, chiseled lines.

It was he who—who——"

"Yes," Marters answered gravely.

"Let's get out of here," MacWhitten repeated fiercely.

Without a word, Thornley crossed the chamber to the far side, MacWhitten treading almost upon his heels. Marters, more slowly, followed behind. Thornley felt for a moment over the woodwork with his hand, then, using the weight of his shoulder, a portion of the wall swung back, revealing an opening similar to the one through which they had entered. He passed through, followed by the engineer.

Marters hung on the threshold a moment for a last glance backward. The light that had been shaded, perhaps, by a passing cloud, to palest, creamy pink, leaped suddenly into crimson glory, and, in fiery, undulating waves of wondrous richness, bathed the silent, upturned face upon the floor.

MacWhitten's voice came, strained and petulant, from the darkness:

"Hurry, man, hurry!" And then, to Thornley: "Run—don't *walk*!"

The passage was as narrow and as black as the one by which they had entered; but, for all that, they ran, keeping their arms straight out before them—ran as the minutes passed, until

ahead there showed a faint gleam of light.

Here Thornley halted them, and crawled cautiously up the opening to the surface. A moment later, answering his call, Marters and the engineer crawled after him.

MacWhitten drew a deep breath, and shook himself as though throwing some great burden from his shoulders.

"I think we can count ourselves fairly safe now," declared Thornley. "They are all on the other side of us, and we've only to swing in a long semicircle around them to strike the creek."

"For Heaven's sake, go on, then!" exclaimed MacWhitten. "I never thought I'd be glad to see that sour-faced Sims again, but I could fall on his ugly neck and love him like a brother."

"I am afraid the affection will be somewhat one-sided," remarked Marters, as they started forward. "We may still have a little reckoning to do with him."

"D'ye think so?" MacWhitten laughed shortly. "And what can he do, him and his measly mate, against the three of us! He'll be civil enough, the swine, and glad enough, you can bank your davy on that. There's the scrap heap, that it's insulting decent machinery to call engines, to think of—mind that, Mr. Marters."

It was midday, and the sun, notwithstanding the protection of the trees and the branches overhead, was merciless in its heat, taxing the strength and vitality of the men to the utmost as they forced their way along; the tangled undergrowth, as in the early morning, tripping them; the network of shrubs and foliage blocking their passage at almost every yard. Once, after an hour's toil, a great cry rose from behind them, and to their right. It swelled and grew in volume, died away, and came again.

"They have found Wilder in the temple," said Thornley. "They'll probably come through the way we did, now; but we ought to have lead enough to reach the creek, and take it easy getting there."

Marters nodded.

"Thornley," he said irrelevantly, "you said Paxley only knew the position of this island roughly. How did Wilder find it? He must have known it exactly—he was the one who really brought me here."

"That was when we started from Bulangan," Thornley replied. "The morning we reached this island I took an observation before landing and worked out the position—I don't think either of us forgot it."

"He was a rare plucked one, that Wilder," grunted MacWhitten; "but I'm hanged if he hadn't his nerve. Speaking of him finding things makes me think that I found something of his. It dropped out of his pocket one of those times when we was carrying him this morning. I don't know as it's anything much. I didn't bother to look at it. Here it is."

The three men halted, and the engineer handed Marters a folded piece of heavy linen-backed paper. Marters opened it, while the others leaned over his shoulder.

"Why," exclaimed Thornley, "it's a map of this island, and drawn pretty accurately, too. Paxley must have made it; that's his writing in the corner, and his figures—I'd know that cross line he always stuck on a seven, French fashion. Besides, there are the two entrances to the underground passages marked, and well enough located, at that, for any one to find them, with a little patience."

Marters placed the map in his pocket.

"That clears up the only point that has puzzled me," he said quietly, as they took up the march again. "That is, Wilder's willingness to leave the steamer

with us alone in the first place, and, what was still more puzzling, why he should have attempted to get away from us afterward by pretending to meet with an accident to his ankle. You are right, MacWhitten. Whatever else he lacked, it was neither nerve nor courage; and, knowing the way, he would not have hesitated to make the attempt to penetrate the temple alone and steal the ruby. That done, he undoubtedly planned to get to the boat, pull back to the ship, secrete his treasure aboard, and take French leave of the *Parona* at the first port."

MacWhitten's reply was a grunt, and they went on in silence, save for the snapping twigs beneath their feet and the rustling crackle of leaves and branches as they fought their way along. At intervals cries and yells reached them; but, while nearer, they appeared to come more from their right than behind them.

A half hour passed, and another. Then suddenly MacWhitten uttered an exultant cry. Through the thinning forest they could see the creek. They began to run; and MacWhitten, taking the lead, burst through the trees and raced along the bank toward where they had hidden their boat.

"It's here, all right," he cried, and began to drag at it, pulling it toward the water.

With Marters' and Thornley's aid, it was soon launched; and, the three embarking, MacWhitten shipped the oars, and began to pull for the open. Twice they grounded in the shallow water of the ebb tide, but both times the big engineer, leaping overboard, freed the cutter and hauled her over the miniature bars.

They rounded the point, and the nose of the cutter shot out to sea. Ahead of them, rolling and wallowing in the swells, was that rusty-plated *Parona*. MacWhitten turned in his seat, and gave vent to a yell of delight.

It was answered in a sudden burst of fiendish screams from a hundred throats.

"Holy sailor!" exclaimed the engineer, swinging around again.

"Pull!" cried Marters sharply. "Pull, MacWhitten, *hard!*"

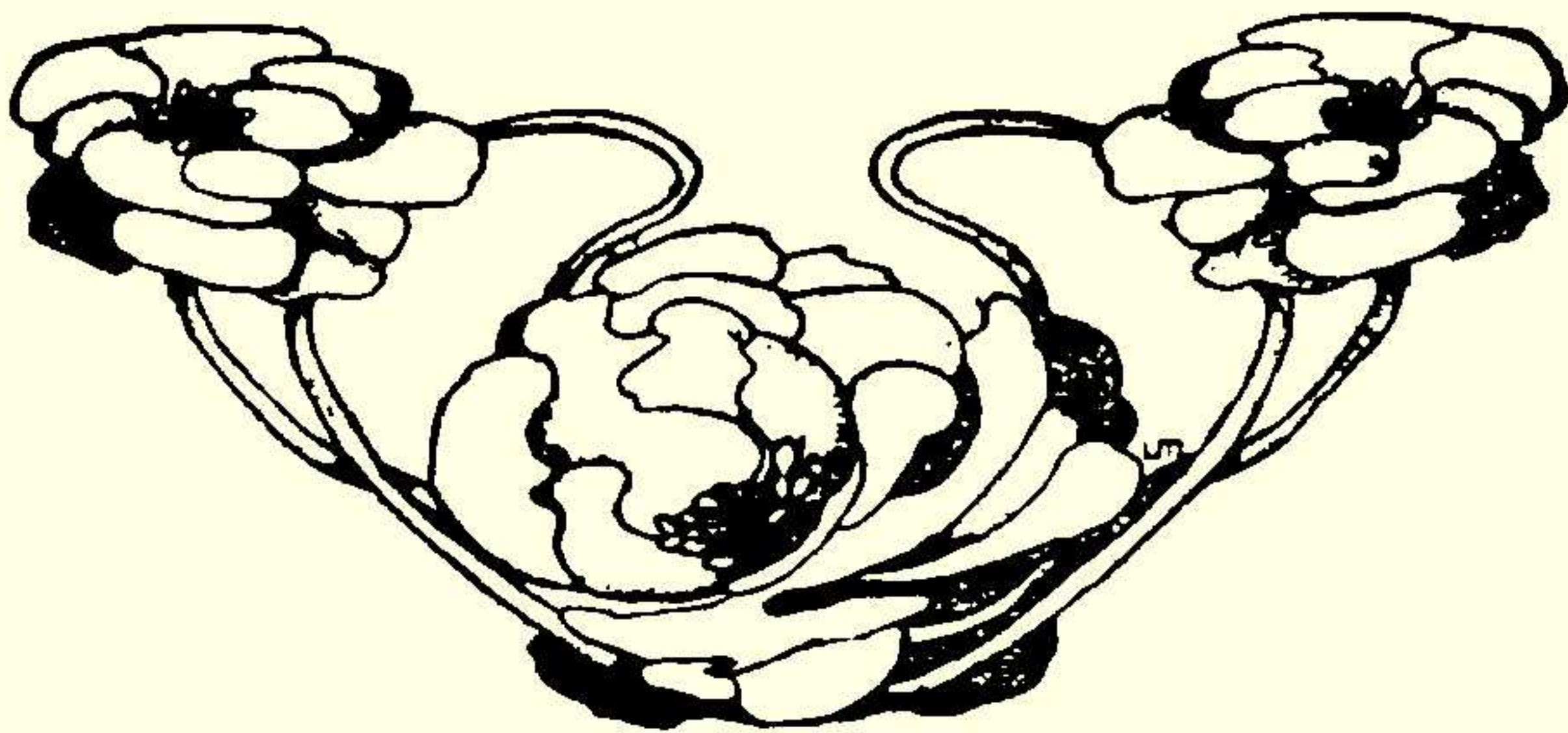
Up the beach, a bare fifty yards away, just opposite the ship, that they had evidently been watching, a mob of half-naked yellow forms had sprung suddenly into life, and now came racing, shrieking in mad rage, along the sand. The foremost flung themselves into the water, and dashed for the cutter. Two reached it, and grasped the gunwale. MacWhitten's unshipped oar rose and

fell like a flail. The boat rocked, shipped water, righted herself, and, with the little way still on her, slid out into deep water.

And then MacWhitten laughed gleefully, like a boy. As he bent to his oars again, he fastened his eyes on Thornley.

"I'm thinking," he chuckled, "ye must have made a right good priest, and a hit with your congregation. Hark to your parish saying good-by to ye! 'Tis a mournful sound!"

But Thornley did not answer. His eyes were fastened on the ship, and his hand, stretched out, pressed hard over Marters' on the tiller.



LIVING MEMORIES

By Carl Buxton

WHEN this brief summer turns into the snows
 Of winter and the last rare days are spent
 Within the arms of Love's mad merriment
 And we stand many worlds apart . . . suppose
 That all the music that this hour knows
 Should slumber like a song whose echo went
 Far in the heart . . . would you know what it meant
 If you received a single yellow rose?

Each year life will renew these mysteries,
 The heart will go back to the songs we sing . . .
 For every year life strips the dreaming trees,
 Each fall the birds take to the open wing,
 But all return like living memories
 When winter has been conquered by the spring.

Undying Hatred

by ~~by~~ **Tod Robbins**



YOU may laugh at my theories," said the spiritualist, regarding me solemnly with his large, unblinking eyes. "Let me tell you the story of something that actually happened in my own experience.

"As you may know, I was born to the battle of life. While I was still a child my parents died, leaving me in very poor circumstances. Fortunately I was large for my age, and, having played on the streets since I could first toddle, the ways of the world were not altogether unknown to me. I invested my small capital in newspapers and stationed myself on a street in the Jewish section of the city.

"Standing on this corner among confusion and bustle, with the din and evil smells of the city rising about me, I sold my wares for fully three years. During this time, I must have glanced into millions of human faces; yet there is only one which stands out distinctly against the background of memory.

"Yes, that old man seems as real to me now as he did fifty years ago. Closing my eyes, I can once more see his tall figure approaching; his face, aged yet wonderfully calm; his melancholy

and penetrating glance; and, lastly, his silver beard which, parting at the chin, fell like two cascades of foam.

"Sometimes he would be quite alone, but usually a boy of my own age would accompany him. This boy had curly, golden hair and deep, blue eyes—eyes that smiled at the old man with a great and, as I now believe, an undying affection. Such childish innocence and goodness were mirrored on this child's face, that one day, when I saw several of the worst lads of the neighborhood torturing some poor cat to death and recognized his countenance among the others—now distorted by cruel, repellent laughter—I could scarcely believe my eyes.

"As time went by, I was subjected to many such emotions before I learned the truth. Almost daily, I saw this child in the street, fighting, swearing, and even stealing; and then later he would walk past me, holding the old man's hand, looking like some saint in a stained-glass window.

"One day in late winter I saw this boy, with several icy snowballs under his arm, stealing into a deserted area-way. A few moments later, the old

man passed me with his accustomed slow and dignified step. As he neared the boy's hiding place, he suddenly staggered and threw both hands up to his eyes. Then I heard an exultant laugh and saw a small figure hurry off down the street.

"Soon a crowd had gathered around the old man. I joined the group and stood looking on while a medical man began searching for his injuries. 'We must get him to a hospital,' he muttered after he had forced the old man to uncover his face. 'He may lose his eyesight as it is.'

"Suddenly I felt a hand laid on my arm. 'Who threw it?' said a voice in my ear.

"Turning around I cried out in astonishment. There, standing beside me, was apparently the very boy who had fled down the street but a moment before. Now his eyes were flashing brightly and his face was very white.

"'Who threw it?' I muttered dazedly.

"'Yes,' he cried, doubling up his fists. 'You were here. Who threw it?'

"At this I turned red from anger. 'You know well enough,' I answered. 'It was *you*.'

"Suddenly the boy's eyes became filled with tears. 'I might have known it,' he muttered, turning away from me. 'It was Abie—my twin brother, Abie. He's always been cruel to grandpa—always!' And putting his coat sleeve up to his eyes, he began to weep as though his heart would break.

"In a moment more an ambulance came dashing down the street. It stopped beside the curb; the door opened, and the old man was helped in by two internes. I caught a last glimpse of him, sitting there like some holy man in thought, his slender, wrinkled hands before his eyes; then the driver whipped up his horses and the ambulance rattled off.

"Two months passed before I saw him again. One spring morning he passed me. Now he wore a black silk bandage over his eyes. The good boy held him by the hand, guiding him carefully through the crowded thoroughfare. As they drew nearer, I saw that both were smiling; and that the old man's head was bent, as though in reality he could see the child.

"During that spring and summer they both passed me repeatedly. But I never saw the wicked child again. He had evidently vanished, like a shadow, into darker city streets; and I, for one, hoped that he would never return.

"When autumn came, we had several days of heavy rain; and, although I was at my usual place, the old man and the child were nowhere to be seen. At last the weather cleared, but still they did not come. I began to think that they must have moved away from that neighborhood.

"One beautiful afternoon in November, a white hearse passed me—a white hearse drawn by two cream-colored horses and followed by a single mourner's carriage. In this second vehicle I saw a figure which I knew. There sat the old man, his broad shoulders drooping, his hands before his sightless eyes, his beard, like two patches of frost, resting on his breast. I felt instinctively that the child was dead, the good child with the blue eyes and golden hair."

For several moments the spiritualist was silent. He tapped the mahogany table with his long white fingers and stared at the lamp over his horn spectacles with the rapt abstraction of an owl.

"But what has all this got to do with your theories?" I asked.

"I was coming to that," he said patiently. "A few days after I saw the funeral, I met an old friend of my father's who had been rather successful. He offered me a position in his

store; I took it and gave up selling papers on the street.

"For twelve years I worked very hard and saved my money. Finally I decided to go into business for myself. I hired a small stationery store near the spot where I had sold newspapers in my childhood.

"It was perhaps a week after my home-coming that a young man entered my shop—a young man of a vaguely familiar appearance. He attracted my attention on the instant. He was evidently far gone in consumption; yet, as is so often the case, his rather girlish cheeks were blooming like a rose and his blue eyes were shining brightly. His face, in spite of its hectic haggardness, still wore the marks of a weak, vicious beauty; but his thin upper lip was contorted by some muscular contraction, giving him the expression of a cornered rat.

"'I say, mister,' said he, pulling off his hat and revealing a tangled mass of golden hair, 'couldn't yer help a poor guy out? I haven't eaten for days.'

"'I've seen you somewhere before, haven't I?' I asked.

"His blue eyes evaded mine and shifted toward the window. 'I don't recollect,' he muttered. 'Perhaps you —' Suddenly he broke off, his body stiffened, his eyes narrowed, his upper lip writhed into a veritable snarl. 'Do yer believe in ghosts?' he cried. 'Yer don't? Well, I'll show yer one in action. Come here.' He beckoned me with a thin, yellow hand.

"I approached in surprise and looked out of the window to where he pointed. There, walking along the street with his imposing mien, was the strange old man who had so ruled my childish imagination. Now his hair was snow white; he wore no bandage over his eyes; and he held one hand before him in rather an awkward way. But in all other respects he seemed scarcely to have changed.

"'Do yer see him?' cried the young man unpleasantly. 'Do yer see how he never runs into anybody? How he walks firm and sure, steppin' down off the curbstones and steppin' up again? Do yer see how he waits for the trucks to go by? Do yer notice that?'

"'Yes,' I answered. 'What of it?'

"'Do yer see the way he holds his hand out before him, as though he was holdin' somebody else's hand, and how he bends his face down, as though he was lookin' into somebody else's face?'

"'Yes.'

"'Well, let me tell yer somethin'. He's blind—stone blind.'

"'What!'

"'Been blind for twelve years. I blinded him myself with some rocks in a snowball. I'm his grandson and I know. He had another grandson that died—his favorite grandson *he* was. Now listen to what I'm sayin'.'

"'I'm listening,' I assured him.

"'Well, when I blinded the old man I ducked,' he continued. 'After my brother died, I came home and tried to get in soft. But it wasn't any use. It was just as though that snivelin' saint was still alive. The old man was always talkin' to him; and sometimes they'd go out walkin', arm in arm. Of course I couldn't see him, but that blind old beggar could. And soon I felt that he was there, right enough. It give me the creeps. One night I broke into the old man's safe and got away with quite a roll.

"'But what I wanted to tell you especial was this: That brother of mine and me was just alike when we was kids. Nobody could tell us apart—not even the old man. But when he died I had no chance against his ghost; grandpop could see only him. Now I was thinkin' that when I die, which won't be so long now, perhaps my spirit would look just like his—same as when

we was kids. What do *you* think about that, mister?"

"There was something so threatening in the face turned toward mine, something so ratlike in the snarling upper lip and glistening eyes, that I stepped back involuntarily. 'What if your spirit should look like his?' I asked curtly.

"'Oh, nothin'," said he with a half laugh and a vicious squint out of the window—"nothin'. But perhaps, if our spirits looked so much alike, I might be able to take grandpop out walkin', and he none the wiser. Do yer know, I'd like to take him out walkin'." And then, with a nod to me, he slouched out of the shop.

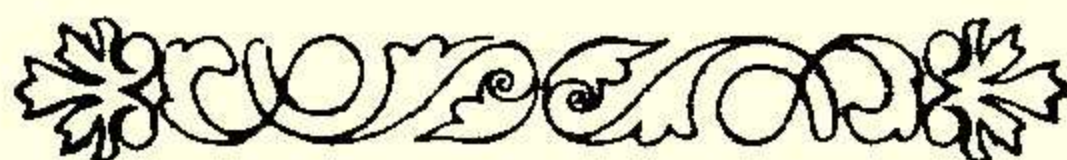
"It was not long after this when I saw the young man again. On the following Monday he fell on the sidewalk before my store with blood gushing from his nose and mouth. It was a vio-

lent hemorrhage. By the time we had carried him inside and called a doctor, he was past all mortal aid.

"Now comes the strange part of the affair. An hour later, as I sat in my shop window, I saw the old man passing. His head was bent, his right hand extended. Perhaps it was imagination, but I thought that he strode along at a faster pace than was his wont. When he reached the curb, he stepped off safely; and then, as a delivery truck turned up the street, he stood still as though waiting for it to pass. The driver whipped up his horses; and, at that very instant, the old man, still with downcast head and outstretched hand, stepped forward."

"And was he killed?" I asked.

"Yes, he was killed," said the spiritualist quietly. "They brought him into my store, as they had brought his grandson. Strange, wasn't it?"



THE TEMPLE

By Alphonse de la Ferté

(Translated from the French.)

A WOMAN strayed into a temple that glittered with myriads of candles. In the distance could be heard the subtle incantation of a high priest above the lower silence of the darkened interior. Every now and then there came the shattering tones of a hidden organ and the slow dying away of a hidden orchestra of lutes.

Thinking it was a place of worship where she might pray, she dropped to her knees and drooped a lovely head in trembling adulation. For many moments she knelt there in deep humility.

Above her in the mid-distance shone a wondrous rose window that shimmered with light like an opaque crystal.

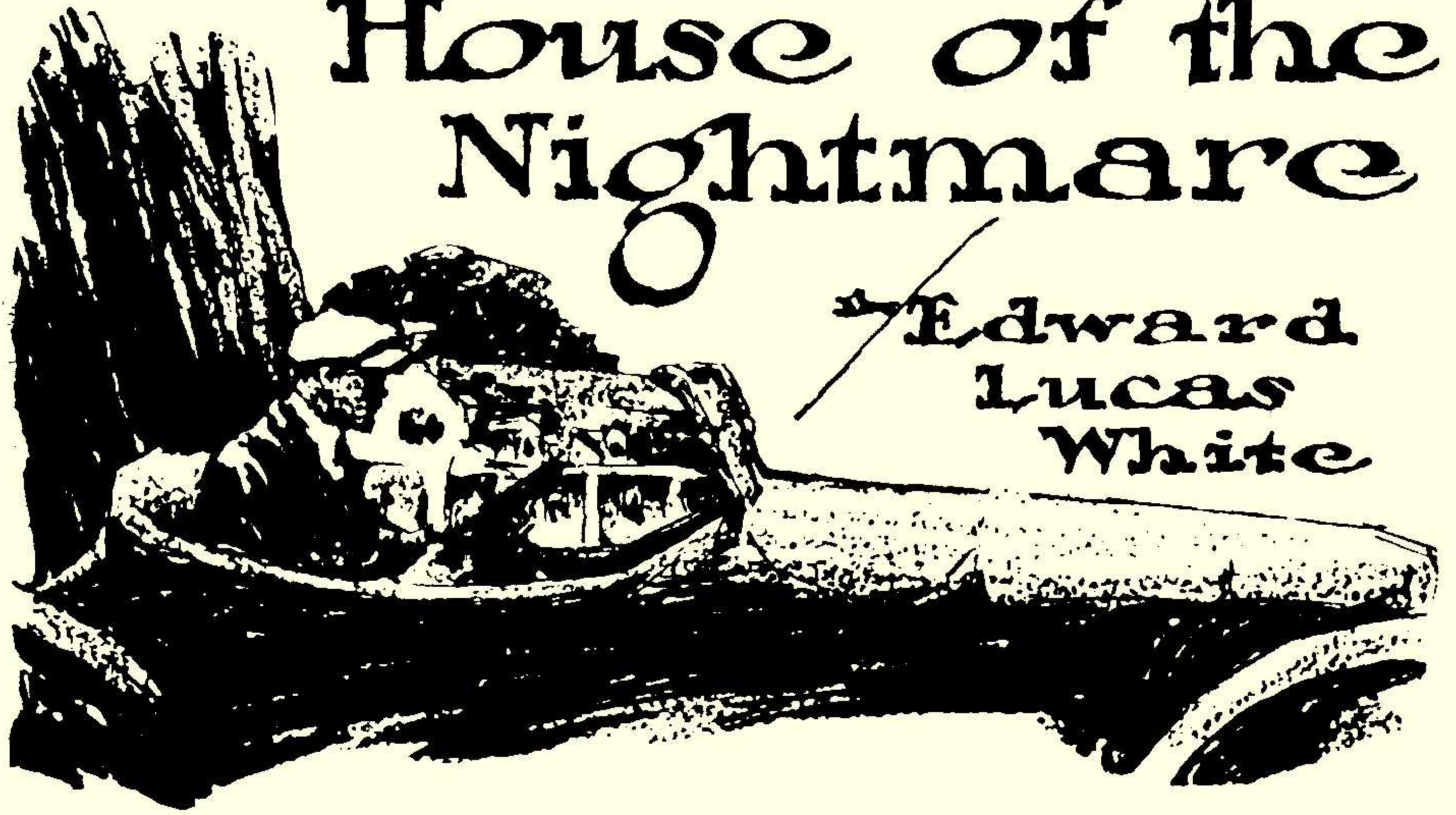
When she looked up she heard nothing, saw nothing. The temple had disappeared. In its place she saw only the skeleton work of a hideous building which had been destroyed.

Her prayers died within her heart and the worship from her-eyes. She arose from her knees, fleeing into the outer sunlight. She had mistaken the House of Love for that of Worship.

She had forgotten that if we do not worship what we love—we hate!

House of the Nightmare

Edward
Lucas
White



I FIRST caught sight of the house from the brow of the mountain as I cleared the woods and looked across the broad valley several hundred feet below me, to the low sun sinking toward the far blue hills. From that momentary viewpoint I had an exaggerated sense of looking almost vertically down. I seemed to be hanging over the checkerboard of roads and fields, dotted with farm buildings, and felt the familiar deception that I could almost throw a stone upon the house. I barely glimpsed its slate roof.

What caught my eyes was the bit of road in front of it, between the mass of dark-green shade trees about the house and the orchard opposite. Perfectly straight it was, bordered by an even row of trees, through which I made out a cinder side path and a low stone wall.

Conspicuous on the orchard side between two of the flanking trees was a white object, which I took to be a tall stone, a vertical splinter of one of the tilted limestone reefs with which the fields of the region are scarred.

The road itself I saw plain as a box-wood ruler on a green baize table. It

gave me a pleasant anticipation of a chance for a burst of speed. I had been painfully traversing closely forested, semimountainous hills. Not a farmhouse had I passed, only wretched cabins by the road, more than twenty miles of which I had found very bad and hindering. Now, when I was not many miles from my expected stopping place, I looked forward to the better going, and to that straight, level bit in particular.

As I sped cautiously down the sharp beginning of the long descent, the trees engulfed me again, and I lost sight of the valley. I dipped into a hollow, rose on the crest of the next hill, and again saw the house, nearer, and not so far below.

The tall stone caught my eye with a shock of surprise. Had I not thought it was opposite the house next the orchard? Clearly it was on the left-hand side of the road toward the house. My self-questioning lasted only the moment as I passed the crest. Then the outlook was cut off again; but I found myself gazing ahead, watching for the next chance at the same view.

At the edge of the second hill I only

saw the bit of road obliquely and could not be sure, but, as at first, the tall stone seemed on the right of the road.

At the top of the third and last hill I looked down the stretch of road under the overarching trees, almost as one would look through a tube. There was a line of whiteness which I took for the tall stone. It was on the right.

I dipped into the last hollow. As I mounted the farther slope I kept my eyes on the top of the road ahead of me. When my line of sight surmounted the rise I marked the tall stone on my right hand among the serried maples. I leaned over, first on one side, then on the other, to inspect my tires, then I threw the lever.

As I flew forward I looked ahead. There was the tall stone—on the left of the road! I was really scared and almost dazed. I meant to stop dead, take a good look at the stone, and make up my mind beyond peradventure whether it was on the right or the left—if not, indeed, in the middle of the road.

In my bewilderment I put on the highest speed. The machine leaped forward; everything I touched went wrong; I steered wildly, slewed to the left, and crashed into a big maple.

When I came to my senses I was flat on my back in the dry ditch. The last rays of the sun sent shafts of golden green light through the maple boughs overhead. My first thought was an odd mixture of appreciation of the beauties of nature and disapproval of my own conduct in touring without a companion—a fad I had regretted more than once. Then my mind cleared and I sat up. I felt myself from the head down. I was not bleeding; no bones were broken; and, while much shaken, I had suffered no serious bruises.

Then I saw the boy. He was standing at the edge of the cinder path, near the ditch. He was stocky and solidly built; barefoot, with his trousers rolled up to his knees; wore a sort of butter-

nut shirt, open at the throat, and was coatless and hatless. He was tow-headed, with a shock of tousled hair; was much freckled, and had a hideous harelip. He shifted from one foot to the other, twiddled his toes, and said nothing whatever, though he stared at me intently.

I scrambled to my feet and proceeded to survey the wreck. It seemed distressingly complete. It had not blown up, nor even caught fire; but otherwise the ruin appeared hopelessly thorough. Everything I examined seemed worse smashed than the rest. My two hamper alone, by one of those cynical jokes of chance, had escaped—both had pitched clear of the wreckage and were unhurt, not even a bottle broken.

During my investigations the boy's faded eyes followed me continuously, but he uttered no word. When I had convinced myself of my helplessness I straightened up and addressed him:

"How far is it to a blacksmith shop?"

"Eight mile," he answered. He had a distressing case of cleft palate and was scarcely intelligible.

"Can you drive me there?" I inquired.

"Nary team on the place," he replied; "nary horse, nary cow."

"How far to the next house?" I continued.

"Six mile," he responded.

I glanced at the sky. The sun had set already. I looked at my watch: it was going—seven thirty-six.

"May I sleep in your house to-night?" I asked.

"You can come in if you want to," he said, "and sleep if you can. House all messy; ma's been dead three years, and dad's away. Nothin' to eat but buckwheat flour and rusty bacon."

"I've plenty to eat," I answered, picking up a hamper. "Just take that hamper, will you?"

"You can come in if you're a mind to," he said, "but you got to carry your

own stuff." He did not speak gruffly or rudely, but appeared mildly stating an inoffensive fact.

"All right," I said; "lead the way."

The yard in front of the house was dark under a dozen or more immense Ailanthus trees. Below them many smaller trees had grown up, and beneath these a dank underwood of tall, rank suckers out of the deep, shaggy, matted grass. What had once been, apparently, a carriage drive left a narrow, curved track, disused and grass-grown, leading to the house. Even here were some shoots of the Ailanthus, and the air was unpleasant with the vile smell of the roots and suckers and the insistent odor of their flowers.

The house was of gray stone, with green shutters faded almost as gray as the stone. Along its front was a veranda, not much raised from the ground, and with no balustrade or railing. On it were several hickory splint rockers. There were eight shuttered windows toward the porch, and midway of them a wide door, with small violet panes on either side of it and a fanlight above.

"Open the door," I said to the boy.

"Open it yourself," he replied, not unpleasantly nor disagreeably, but in such a tone that one could not but take the suggestion as a matter of course.

I put down the two hampers and tried the door. It was latched, but not locked, and opened with a rusty grind of its hinges, on which it sagged crazily, scraping the floor as it turned. The passage smelled moldy and damp. There were several doors on either side; the boy pointed to the first on the right.

"You can have that room," he said.

I opened the door. What with the dusk, the interlacing trees outside the piazza roof, and the closed shutter, I could make out little.

"Better get a lamp," I said to the boy.

"Nary lamp," he declared cheerfully. "Nary candle. Mostly I get abed before dark."

I returned to the remains of my conveyance. All four of my lamps were merely scrap metal and splintered glass. My lantern was mashed flat. I always, however, carried candles in my valise. This I found split and crushed, but still holding together. I carried it to the porch, opened it, and took out three candles.

Entering the room, where I found the boy standing just where I had left him, I lit the candle. The walls were whitewashed, the floor bare. There was a mildewed, chilly smell, but the bed looked freshly made up and clean, although it felt clammy.

With a few drops of its own grease I stuck the candle on the corner of a mean, rickety little bureau. There was nothing else in the room save two rush-bottomed chairs and a small table. I went out on the porch, brought in my valise, and put it on the bed. I raised the sash of each window and pushed open the shutters, then I asked the boy, who had not moved or spoken, to show me the way to the kitchen. He led me straight through the hall to the back of the house. The kitchen was large, and had no furniture save some pine chairs, a pine bench, and a pine table.

I stuck two candles on opposite corners of the table. There was no stove or range in the kitchen, only a big hearth, the ashes in which smelled and looked a month old. The wood in the woodshed was dry enough, but even it had a cellary, stale smell. The ax and hatchet were both rusty and dull, but usable, and I quickly made a big fire. To my amazement, for the mid-June evening was hot and still, the boy, a wry smile on his ugly face, almost leaned over the flame, hands and arms spread out, and fairly roasted himself.

"Are you cold?" I inquired.

"I'm allus cold," he replied, hugging

the fire closer than ever, till I thought he must scorch.

I left him toasting himself while I went in search of water. I discovered the pump, which was in working order and not dry on the valves; but I had a furious struggle to fill the two leaky pails I had found. When I had put water to boil I fetched my hampers from the porch.

I brushed the table and set out my meal—cold fowl, cold ham, white and brown bread, olives, jam, and cake. When the can of soup was hot and the coffee made I drew up two chairs to the table and invited the boy to join me.

"I ain't hungry," he said; "I've had supper."

He was a new sort of boy to me; all the boys I knew were hearty eaters and always ready. I had felt hungry myself, but somehow when I came to eat I had little appetite and hardly relished the food. I soon made an end of my meal, covered the fire, blew out the candles, and returned to the porch, where I dropped into one of the hickory rockers to smoke. The boy followed me silently and seated himself on the porch floor, leaning against a pillar, his feet on the grass outside.

"What do you do," I asked, "when your father is away?"

"Just loaf 'round," he said. "Just fool 'round."

"How far off are your nearest neighbors?" I asked.

"Don't no neighbors never come here," he stated. "Say they're afeared of the ghosts."

I was not at all startled; the place had all those aspects which lead to a house being called haunted. I was struck by his odd matter-of-fact way of speaking—it was as if he had said they were afraid of a cross dog.

"Do you ever see any ghosts around here?" I continued.

"Never see 'em," he answered, as if

I had mentioned tramps or partridges. "Never hear 'em. Sort o' feel 'em 'round sometimes."

"Are you afraid of them?" I asked.

"Nope," he declared. "I ain't skeered o' ghosts; I'm skeered o' nightmares. Ever have nightmares?"

"Very seldom," I replied.

"I do," he returned. "Allus have the same nightmare—big sow, large as a steer, trying to eat me up. Wake up so skeered I could run to never. No-where to run to. Go to sleep, and have it again. Wake up worse skeered than ever. Dad says it's buckwheat cakes in summer."

"You must have teased a sow some time," I said.

"Yep," he answered. "Teased a big sow wunst, holding up one of her pigs by the hind leg. Teased her too long. Fell in the pen and got bit up some. Wisht I hadn't 'a' teased her. Have that nightmare three times a week sometimes. Worse'n being burnt out. Worse'n ghosts. Say, I sorter feel ghosts around now."

He was not trying to frighten me. He was as simply stating an opinion as if he had spoken of bats or mosquitoes. I made no reply, and found myself listening involuntarily. My pipe went out. I did not really want another, but felt disinclined for bed as yet, and was comfortable where I was, while the smell of the Ailanthus blossoms was very disagreeable. I filled my pipe again, lit it, and then, as I puffed, somehow dozed off for a moment.

I awoke with a sensation of some light fabric trailed across my face. The boy's position was unchanged.

"Did you do that?" I asked sharply.

"Ain't done nary thing," he rejoined. "What was it?"

"It was like a piece of mosquito-netting brushed over my face."

"That ain't netting," he asserted; "that's a veil. That's one of the ghosts. Some blow on you; some touch

you with their long, cold fingers. That one with the veil she drags across your face—well, mostly I think it's ma."

He spoke with the unassailable conviction of the child in "We Are Seven." I found no words to reply, and rose to go to bed.

"Good night," I said.

"Good night," he echoed. "I'll set out here a spell yet."

I lit the match, found the candle I had stuck on the corner of the shabby little bureau, and undressed. The bed had a comfortable husk mattress, and I was soon asleep.

I had the sensation of having slept some time when I had a nightmare—the very nightmare the boy had described. A huge sow, big as a dray horse, was reared up on her forelegs over the footboard of the bed, trying to scramble over to me. She grunted and puffed, and I felt I was the food she craved. I knew in the dream that it was only a dream, and strove to wake up.

Then the gigantic dream beast floundered over the footboard, fell across my shins, and I awoke.

I was in darkness as absolute as if I were sealed in a jet vault, yet the shudder of the nightmare instantly subsided, my nerves quieted; I realized where I was, and felt not the least panic. I turned over and was asleep again almost at once. Then I had a real nightmare, not recognizable as a dream, but appallingly real—an unutterable agony of reasonless horror.

There was a Thing in the room; not a sow, nor any other namable creature, but a Thing. It was as big as an elephant, filled the room to the ceiling, was shaped like a wild boar, seated on its haunches, with its forelegs braced stiffly in front of it. It had a hot, slobbering, red mouth, full of big tusks, and its jaws worked hungrily. It shuffled and hunched itself forward, inch by inch, till its forelegs straddled the bed.

The bed crushed up like wet blotting-paper, and I felt the weight of the thing on my feet, on my legs, on my body, on my chest. It was hungry, and I was what it was hungry for, and it meant to begin on my face. Its dripping mouth was nearer and nearer.

Then the dream helplessness that made me unable to call or move suddenly gave way, and I yelled and awoke. This time my terror was positive and not to be shaken off.

It was near dawn: I could descry dimly the cracked, dirty windowpanes. I got up, lit the stump of my candle and two fresh ones, dressed hastily, strapped my ruined valise, and put it on the porch against the wall near the door. Then I called the boy. I realized quite suddenly that I had not told him my name or asked his.

I shouted "Hello!" a few times, but won no answer. I had had enough of that house. I was still permeated with the panic of the nightmare. I desisted from shouting, made no search, but with two candles went out to the kitchen. I took a swallow of cold coffee and munched a biscuit as I hustled my belongings into my hampers. Then, leaving a silver dollar on the table, I carried the hampers out on the porch and dumped them by my valise.

It was now light enough to see to walk, and I went out to the road. Already the night dew had rusted much of the wreck, making it look more hopeless than before. It was, however, entirely undisturbed. There was not so much as a wheel track or a hoofprint on the road. The tall, white stone, uncertainty about which had caused my disaster, stood like a sentinel opposite where I had upset.

I set out to find that blacksmith shop. Before I had gone far the sun rose clear from the horizon, and almost at once scorching. As I footed it along I grew very much heated, and it seemed more like ten miles than six before I

reached the first house. It was a new frame house, neatly painted and close to the road, with a whitewashed fence along its garden front.

I was about to open the gate when a big black dog with a curly tail bounded out of the bushes. He did not bark, but stood inside the gate wagging his tail and regarding me with a friendly eye; yet I hesitated with my hand on the latch, and considered. The dog might not be as friendly as he looked, and the sight of him made me realize that except for the boy I had seen no creature about the house where I had spent the night; no dog or cat; not even a toad or bird. While I was ruminating upon this a man came from behind the house.

"Will your dog bite?" I asked.

"Naw," he answered; "he don't bite. Come in."

I told him I had had an accident to my automobile, and asked if he could drive me to the blacksmith shop and back to my wreckage.

"Cert," he said. "Happy to help you. I'll hitch up shortly. Where'd you smash?"

"In front of the gray house about six miles back," I answered.

"That big stone-built house?" he queried.

"The same," I assented.

"Did you go a-past here?" he inquired, astonished. "I didn't hear ye."

"No," I said; "I came from the other direction."

"Why," he meditated, "you must 'a' smashed 'bout sunup. Did you come over them mountains in the dark?"

"No," I replied; "I came over them yesterday evening. I smashed up about sunset."

"Sundown!" he exclaimed. "Where in thunder've been all night?"

"I slept in the house where I broke down."

"In that there big stone-built house in the trees?" he demanded.

"Yes," I agreed.

"Why," he quavered excitedly, "that there house is haunted! They say if you have to drive past it after dark, you can't tell which side of the road the big white stone is on."

"I couldn't tell even before sunset," I said.

"There!" he exclaimed. "Look at that, now! And you slep' in that house! Did you sleep, honest?"

"I slept pretty well," I said. "Except for a nightmare, I slept all night."

"Well," he commented, "I wouldn't go in that there house for a farm, nor sleep in it for my salvation. And you slep'! How in thunder did you get in?"

"The boy took me in," I said.

"What sort of a boy?" he queried, his eyes fixed on me with a queer, countrified look of absorbed interest.

"A thickset, freckle-faced boy with a harelip," I said.

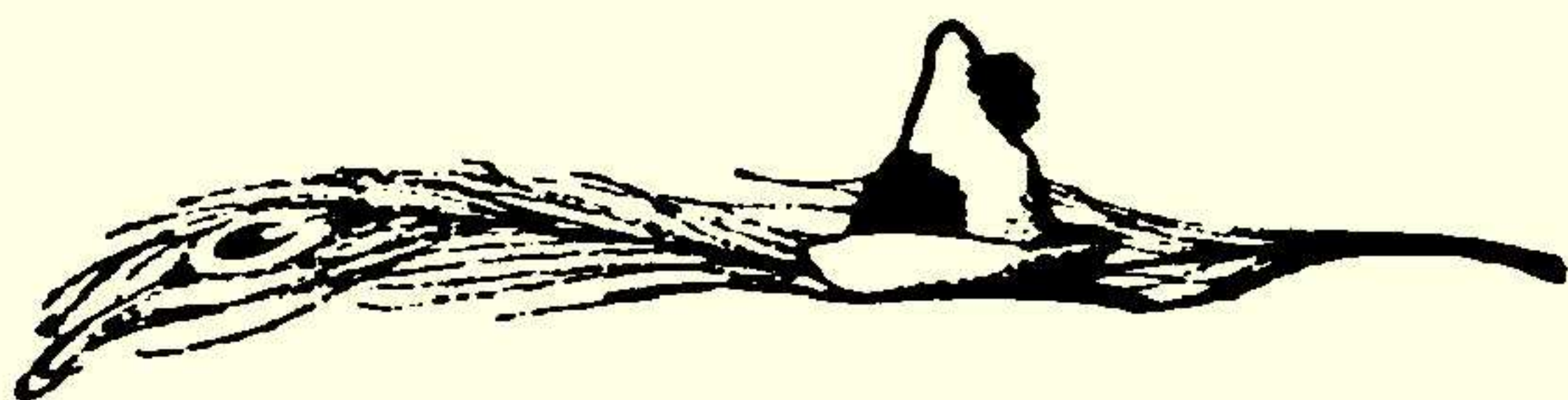
"Talk like his mouth was full o' mush?" he demanded.

"Yes," I said; "bad case of cleft palate."

"Well!" he exclaimed. "I never did believe in ghosts, and I never did half believe that house was haunted, but I know it now. And you slep'!"

"I didn't see any ghosts," I retorted irritably.

"You seen a ghost for sure," he rejoined solemnly. "That there harelip boy's been dead six months."



The Gift Wife

Rupert
Hughes



CHAPTER I.

THE FELLOW CATACOMBS.

THOUGH the clouds from their cigars mingled in the thickening air of the smoking compartment, the two Americans might have been castaways on desert islands in different oceans for all the congress they held.

Their moods seemed as far apart as their persons were dissimilar, the one smiling broad-cheekedly even on the flat landscape—the only thing in Germany that is not fat; the other seeing nothing, but leanly intent on some inner panorama of remorse, revenge, unrequited hate or love, or some such acid emotion.

His very behavior toward his cigar showed that. A musician would have said that the plump fellow smoked in luxurious legato, the other in a staccato agitato. He puffed ferociously for a while; yet a little later his hand must be seeking another match, and it trembled as he ransacked his pockets.

He scratched it with impatience, and the shaken illumination threw a little calcium on a face of drawn intensity, on such a gaunt and hunted intensity

that the fat man felt not entirely easy of his company in the leather-padded cell.

Strange how unlike Americans are at home and how like abroad. These two differed in every detail of feature, costume, and behavior, yet the first glance either gave the other told both that they were fellow countrymen. And their presence on the Nord Express, bound for Ostend, implied that their common destination was home.

They seemed to be taking back experiences as different as their souls and bodies.

One was plump in the most generous stretch of the epithet; and complacent seemingly with the pleasant thoughts of a traveler full of agreeable remembrances, yet glad to be returning to yet more delightful memories. The other was slim to the verge of lankness, and some tragedy was apparently at ferment within him.

In America, at least in the less effete regions, they would probably have drifted into comment on the weather or some such unimpertinent topic.

But being in Europe, where a general suspicion is the most contagious of all

habits of mind, they mewed themselves up in themselves, and kept castle feudally, with moats full and portcullises down.

The rotund citizen, who had been the first to establish himself in the smoking compartment of the corridor car, observed the latter comer with surreptition, while seeming to let his unfocused gaze follow his own smoke.

Noting the taut features, and the eyebrows locked with two deep bars, he suspected the stranger of contemplating some crime or fleeing its consequence.

On impulse he picked up again the copy of the *Hamburgische Tagblatt* he had been laboring over till he had grown tired.

His few words of conversation-book German had given him an idea of some desperate murder committed in Braunschweig. He had gleaned that the guilty wretch had escaped. This might be he.

As he went back over the column, even his scant vocabulary showed him that whoever else the stranger might be, this man was not that man.

For the fugitive was everything that this man was not; the fugitive was described, among several details which were Sanskrit to the American, as fat, burly, and an Austrian, with a duel scar that had clipped the lobe off a left ear and made a furrow across the cheek to the nostril.

With a sigh almost of disappointment, the foiled "Hawkshaw" put the paper aside and resumed the study of his vis-à-vis. He took his invoice through opportune clouds of smoke. In the first place, his man had the forehead of intelligence ripened with study.

His jaw was neatly planed and square, yet the chin was weak. The lips were compressed till they were thin and pale, yet the mouth was one in which frailties and strengths were at

war, as indeed they were throughout the man's catalogue of traits.

The stranger's costume was almost overemphatic in the matter of modesty, in thorough contrast with the plump man's own costume, which included a richly tinted ultra-cut coat, baggy, yet sharply creased, trousers, a glimpse of shameless purple between his trouser cuffs and his yellow shoetops, a white-rimmed waistcoat of many colors draped about his rotundity like a Union Jack, a patterned shirt, and a flaming silk scarf with a twisted gold skewer in it.

The stranger was dressed as negligently as an almost finicky neatness would permit. Hat, coat, neckscarf, trousers, waistcoat, stockings, shoes, all were black, yet with no hint of mourning. He had the look of a professional person.

The most striking, the only really striking, trait of the man was the hand that held—or rather clutched—the cigar.

It was a notable hand, a hand of skill, of cunning, the hand of a craftsman perhaps—too muscular for a painter's—a sculptor's, maybe—or a pianist's. The finger nails were trimmed to the quick, not gnawed, but carefully trimmed.

And so after much puffing, much secret scrutiny, and much unworthy curiosity, the analyst had decided only that the excited stranger was an American of education and of middling prosperity.

And that was as far as he could go. The train had gone much farther, before a nervous shift of position disclosed on the waistcoat of his subject a little gleaming jewel. The next glance revealed it a fraternity pin.

Was it? Could it be? It was! The stranger wore the emblem of his own fraternity, the dread brotherhood whose little stone meetinghouse at New Haven was known as the Catacombs.

There was magic in the gemmed monogram, a thrill of old brotherhood, of clasped hands, of mystic initiation rites that had seemed solemn enough once, however puerile now, of secrets that were important only by agreement, but made sacred by youthful earnestness, of comradeship through college years, of humanizing experiences in odd rencounters with brothers in out-of-the-way places, of oaths of fealty, of voices linked in chorused songs, of all that college and fraternity mean to those that have known them.

He made a long battle with hesitance, the double hesitance of infringing on a man's trouble and of incurring responsibility by taking up with a casual stranger laboring under some excitement, perhaps some scandal that might defile with pitch whosoever touched him. But as last he yielded to the fraternal impulse.

He cleared his throat with resolution, leaned forward, and said:

"I beg your pardon. I see that you are a Catacomb."

"Ye-es," came the answer with a resentful tang, for at Yale it is as crass an insult to mention a man's fraternity as to breathe upon the mirror of a woman's reputation. The fat man felt easier. He leaned forwarder, and said reassuringly:

"Don't shoot. So am I."

"No!"

"Yes."

"What year?"

"Ninety-two."

"My year."

"Well, I'll be——"

"So will I."

"I ought to know you, then. Wait! don't tell me! You're—no—yes—you must be Jebb—old Dave Jebb. My name is——"

"Hold on! Give me a chance. Let me see."

Jebb looked the plump one up and down, also around, stared at the flam-

boyant and commodious costume, then a broad grin cheered his lonely face.

He chuckled. "Those spirituelle outlines, them shy little wasp waist, those modest waistcoat—can belong only and always to Big Bill Gaines—Goliath, we used to call you."

"That's right. David and Goliath, here we are again!"

"Well, I'll be——" Even more so.

Their hands smote resoundingly, and their fingers interlocked in a complicated secret clasp.

They were Yale fellows, well met. And their language was as unacademic as that of most collegians, who have committed Alma Matricide.

"Where you bound, Bill? Home?"

"Yep. I cross Ostend, Dover, and down to Southampton to catch the American liner."

"Me, too."

"Well, well. This is great. Got to have a drink on this."

"No, thanks," with a curious desiccation of tone.

"Aw, come along, Dave. Got a flask of it in my suit case. None of your foreign smoke choke—old Bourbon."

"Please don't, Bill!"

There was an emphasis that miffed Gaines. He sputtered like a glowing stove under a spill of cold water:

"As I remember, Jebb, my boy, you used to indulge a bit in the old days—hit it up pretty lively now and then."

"That's the trouble, Bill."

"Not turned Prohibish? You haven't gone and got religion and turned into a Demosthenes or Polyphemus—or whoever it was that used to drink water?" Gaines' voice was full of tears and pleading. "You haven't done that, have you, Dave?"

"Nope. Not at all, not a single damtall."

"That's better. Just taking a little jaunt on the water wagon, eh?"

"Strapped to the seat."

"Too bad. It's powerful dry to meet

up like this after—Lord, how many years ago was it?"

"Seems like fourteen-ninety-two when I entered college. We'll soon be doing the oldest-living-alumni stunt."

Gaines was rolypoly with good feeling. Again he pleaded:

"Couldn't you drop off the sprinkler for just a little nip? You can keep one foot on the step."

There was an unimaginable sadness in Jebb's eyes and voice, an unbelievable longing in his tone:

"I'd like to, Billy; but if I did, God only knows what would happen. You see I'm a—Lord, but I'm glad to meet you, Billy, specially just at this moment. I'm in trouble, Billy, good and plenty."

"I thought you looked a little pale around the gills when you first blew in here. I sized you up for a murderer doing a get-away."

Jebb smiled an unamused smile.

"I've never killed anybody—except legitimately in the line of my profession, but I'm up against it harder than hard."

Gaines' fat hand was instant to his fat wallet.

"I'm on my way home, Dave, after Europing about, but here's what they left me. Give me enough to tip the stewards and—go as far as you like."

"It's not money, Billy. I'm full of it." He looked about cautiously, and bending close murmured:

"I've got ten thou. in my belt."

"Ten thou, and worried? Lord, if I ever saw that much at once I wouldn't care whether school kept or not. What you afraid of? Burglars? Pickpockets?"

"Not a bit. I'm afraid of me—little old David J. *Me!*"

"Afraid you'll give it away or throw it at a cat?"

"I'm as likely to as not when I'm—Lord, but I'm glad to see you, Billy. For the sake of old sake's sake, I'm

going to put my little hand in yours and let you lead me home."

"What's the matter, old boy?"

"Excuse me a minute, till I go see if the child is all right."

"The child?"

But he was gone. He returned in a moment along the corridor, and began to talk as he took his place again:

"You see, it's like this——"

Gaines broke in:

"One minute, pard. Did you say something about a chee-ild?"

"Yes, I left her for a moment to sneak a smoke. She's scraped acquaintance with another little girl in the same compartment, and I left her in charge of the parents. As I started to say——"

"But the child—you're married, then? Isn't your wife with you?"

"I have no wife."

"Do I condole or congratulate? Sod or grass?"

"Neither. I've never married."

"Oh, excuse me!"

"And don't go to thinking that, either. The child isn't mine at all. I'm just taking her to America."

"Sort of wet nurse, eh? Go on, stranger, your story interests me. You've got a strange child and a ransom of ten thou. I spotted you for a professional the minute I saw you, Dave. Are you one of those cute kidnapers?"

"No, I'm a grave robber—when I'm lucky. If you'll close your trap, I'll tell you. I'll begin at the beginning. When I left Yale I took up surgery."

"You always were a great cut-up."

"Shut up. I took my diploma at the College of Physicians and Surgeons, went to Johns Hopkins, then to the Vienna University, and came back to New York perspiring knowledge at every pore. Didn't have much practice, of course, at first, but got a lot to do in the hospitals, and made quite a hit with some experiments of my own."

"You're a pretty good little carver, I suppose?"

"I'm great, Billy."

"You ought to know."

"I do. I am. That is, I'm great, with extenuating circumstances. I'm a genius, but a damfool. I have a curse that ruins everything."

"Not cocaine."

"No. I've somehow escaped drugs."

"Our mutual friend, Barleycorn?"

"Old John Barleycorn."

"I see. It makes your hand unsteady, eh?"

"No. I never play with the fire, except at regular intervals. Then I commit arson. I'm what is popularly known as a periodical, Billy—with a capital P. It's a terrible thing to confess even to old Goliath Gaines, but it's all in the Catacombs, and I'm not the only person on earth with a flaw in his make-up. Nobody knows how badly assembled human machines are, Billy, except doctors. If it weren't for our Hippocratic oath, what closet doors we could open in the best simulated families."

"I've got a skeleton, I suppose," said Gaines, "but I can't find it. My skeleton is a tendency to turn into a balloon more or less dirigible. I've tried everything. I've banted in seven languages. Diet? I haven't eaten a thing for ten years, but I—— You don't know any sure cure for fat, do you?"

"Nobody does, Billy," said Jebb with the cynical frankness doctors employ to their friends. Then with a look at his own lank legs: "I've got the anti-fat serum in my system, I suppose, but I don't know what it is."

Gaines shook his fat head and all his chins in elephantine despair. "Thanks for your little ray of discouragement. Go on with your story. I'll tell you mine later."

"So you've developed one of those clockwork thirsts, eh? Too bad, old boy. I had a pal who was like you—

he's dead now—but he found a cure. Have you tried——"

"Your friend found the one sure cure. Don't start anything beginning, 'Have you tried?' I've tried all the Have-you-trieds, and then some. I've tested all there are in the books and a thousand of my own invention."

"I had a landlady who used to buy those 'put some in your husband's coffee and he won't notice it till he's cured!' Her coffee was so bad, anyway, I never noticed it. But no more did she notice any cure."

"You see, Billy, most of the habit cures depend on the will eventually, but when the will itself is diseased, what can you do?"

"It's like making rabbit pie when you can't catch the rabbit. The one important fact is that everybody has his personal devil, and that's mine."

"Otherwise I'm all to the good. I've got both arms, both legs, sound eyes, ears, lungs, stomach, no floating kidneys, a liver you couldn't derange with an ax, an ability to work forty hours at a stretch, and a gift for operative surgery that is a marvel, if I do say it. But I've got an intermittent thirst that amounts to mania, and it does its little best to nullify all my other gifts."

"If it weren't for that I'd be famous and rich."

"Don't you call ten thousand iron men rich?"

"Oh, I'm rich enough now. I feel like old King Midas, but the trouble is I've got his long ears, too, and I know it."

"When I'm in my—cups, is the polite expression. But it's a case of bathtub with me. I think I'm Mr. Croesus, and I spend what I have as if I owned the Standard Oil and had struck a gusher of gold."

"I don't tipple between sprees. I hate the sniff of liquor in my dry seasons. But when my time rolls round, I've the thirst of a man lost in the Mo-

have Desert. I see mirages, but not of waterfalls, Billy—fire waterfalls!

"My life runs on schedule. So many months of humanity, then three weeks of humidity. I'm like the tropics, all rain or all sun.

"And I can pretty nearly tell you to the hour and the minute just when my freshet begins. I'm a sort of Doctor Jekyll and Mr. Hydrophobia.

"When the rabies bites me the sight of water makes me froth at the mouth. For two or three weeks I go about like an idiot trying to put out a raging fire by pouring on kerosene."

"Poor old boy," said Gaines. "It must be hell. What do you do? Lock yourself in a room and order drinks through the keyhole?"

"If I only did! If I only did! But I'm no stationary dipsomaniac. I'm the only original Wandering Jew—no connection with a cheap imitator of similar name. I hardly show what I'm carrying—they tell me.

"I look a bit feverish, and I'm slightly thick of tongue, but I have a sub-intelligence that keeps me from being run over by the cars. My trouble is like certain forms of aphasia, and amnesia with double personality, and I am determined to hike. And I hike—till I drop or come round sober. Then I'm like the man Bill Nye tells about who was found after the train wreck, plucking violets and gently murmuring: 'Where am I?'"

Gaines looked at him more in amazement than in sorrow.

"You must have had some rare old experiences."

Gaines loved to travel.

"No doubt, Billy, no doubt. But I don't know what my experiences are. Once in a while I'll meet some man who hails me by some strange name and says I borrowed money from him in Pueblo, or lent him money in Skaneateles. I never ask any questions. I

take his word for it, and say: 'Oh, yes, of course.'

"I tell you it's an uncanny sort of thing to wake up in a mysterious room in some unheard-of place and wonder how under the sun you got there and where under the sun it is."

Gaines was reminded:

"I used to walk in my sleep as a boy. Once I found myself in my nightie in the middle of a ballroom floor. I had just meandered in. The floor committee meandered me out and I woke when I lit.

"The other night I got turned round in bed in a hotel in Leipsic, and when I woke up with my head to the foot-board I was so bewildered I came near hollering for the night clerk. I thought somebody had put a voodoo on me."

"That's the feeling exactly," said Jebb, "only when I wake up I'm as weak as a sick cat, and my head—oh, my head! And my tongue—oh, oh, my tongue!"

"I haven't the faintest idea of what I have done, or where I have been, or where I am. I reach for my trousers, and the pockets are empty—my watch is gone, stolen, given away to a polite street-car conductor or thrown at a cat.

"Then I have to recover, send a telegram collect, or draw on my bank—that's no fun among strangers—and get home the best way I can.

"I'm a periodical prodigal, Billy; only I have no father to fall on my neck and offer me veal. I sneak back to my own shack, and try to regain my disgusted and mystified patients by scattering lies by the bushel."

It was Gaines' amiable nature to try to wring a drop of honey from every gall bag.

"You must be a great little surgeon, Davey, to keep any practice at all."

"I am, but I had to give up New York and go out West to a smaller city where they have to have me, handicap and all.

"When I feel the madness coming on I arrange my affairs, transfer my patients to other hands, say that I've been called East about my property—and then I hit the trail on the long hike.

"If I weren't one of the cleverest surgeons that ever ligated an artery, I'd be in the poorhouse to-day. If I weren't cursed with the bitterest blight that ever ruined a soul I'd be at the top of my profession."

"Poor old Jebb!" sighed Gaines. "But don't you care, we've all got our troubles. Now, to look at me, you wouldn't think—but that can wait. You were going to tell me what I could do for you."

"Well, now that you know all, as they say in the storybooks, I'll tell you the rest. The last time I fell I woke up in New Orleans.

"When I got home I found a letter saying that a distant relative had died, leaving me a leasehold in London. That's one of the things that happens in storybooks, too. But truth sometimes tried to imitate fiction.

"I vowed I'd jump across the Atlantic, clean up what cash I could, and invest it where I couldn't touch the principal.

"Well, just when I was getting my affairs straightened up so that I could start a beautiful operation came my way. No money in it, but some reputation and a rare opportunity I couldn't let slide—an exquisite fibroid tumor intricately and vitally involved.

"The woman, Mrs. Milburn, was a widow, and her only child had gone to Berlin with her husband, John Thatcher, and their child.

"When Mrs. Milburn heard that she must undergo a capital operation she cabled her daughter to come and hold her hand while she went under the ether.

"John Thatcher couldn't afford to come, and his wife took the first

steamer, leaving the little girl with her father. I brought Mrs. Milburn through—and good work, too—there'll be an article about it in the *Medical Record*.

"Mrs. Thatcher cried all over me, and said she would pay my bill when her husband made his fortune by a great invention he was working on. We doctors get a lot of that money! But I said: 'Don't let that worry you!' We always say that.

"Just as Mrs. Thatcher was about to sail back to Europe she got a cablegram saying that her husband had committed suicide scandalously with a woman of bad name.

"The Dutchman who sent it had to pay a mark a word, and he didn't waste any breaking it gently.

"Thatcher left only funds enough to bury him. Strangers took the child in charge. The death and the circumstances and the shock prostrated Mrs. Thatcher completely.

"She was in no condition to go over and bring back the little girl. The money was a big consideration, too, and I—well, I offered to get the child and bring her back with me—fool that I was!"

"Fool nothing," Gaines blurted. "It was mighty white of you, old boy."

Jebb shook his head. "I meant well, but you know where we well-intentioned people lay the asphalt."

"I don't follow you, Davey."

"I hoped you would, Billy. It's so nauseating to explain. But here goes: I was so delayed in starting from America and met so much postponement in settling my affairs in poky old London, and had so many details to close up for poor Thatcher before I left Berlin with the child that I have exhausted my vacation from Hades."

"You don't mean——"

"That's just exactly what I mean. I've been so busy in new scenes that I lost count of the days. This morn-

ing, as I boarded the train at Berlin, a drunken man—needless to say, he was an American—lurched into me.

He paused to lean on me and beg my pardon profusely. I couldn't dodge his breath. I shook him off, but I had felt that first clutch of the thirst. It comes with a rush, Billy, when it comes. And I might as well fight it as try to wrestle with a London fog.

"It's got me. And I'm afraid, Billy, horribly afraid. I feel like a man who has sold his soul to the devil when the clock strikes and he smells brimstone. It doesn't matter about my rotten soul or the body it torments.

"And I have no children—I've never dared to marry and drag any woman along my path. My parents—Heaven be praised!—died when I was in college.

"I got my curse from poor old dad, whose father acquired it in the grand old days when the high society was found under the table after dinner. I'm alone now. There'd be none to mourn for me.

"But here I am with a poor widow's only child in my care, and I'm racing with fate. And there's another thing, Billy.

"In Berlin I found proofs that this poor Thatcher didn't commit suicide—he tried to save the woman's life—she was drowning—she dragged him to his death—they both died—he didn't even know who she was. Besides, he did leave something for his family.

"In my hand bag I have his finished drawings for a great invention that looks to me good for a fortune if it can be got to America and patented and placed.

"So you see, Billy, what a load I've got on my chest; the little child, her father's honor, her mother's salvation from poverty—all these, and an ocean and half a continent between me and safety.

"It's no question of will power. I

have none. Your offer of a nip of—you know—went through me like a knife. If you want to spare me agony don't use even the name of—of any of those things in my hearing. If I get a sniff of it I'll fight for it. And after the first drop is on my tongue it's all over."

He was digging his fingers into the leather as he spoke, and swaying as if some invisible power were trying to drag him to his feet.

CHAPTER II.

THE FOUND IS LOST.

GOLIATH looked at David with eyes of complete compassion. He said:

"Don't you care, Dave. I'll stick to you till it's all over. If you should be—er—incapacitated I'll get the child to her mother, and the documents, too; so just qualify for the Don't Worry Club, and leave the rest to me.

"But don't you think you'd better hand over those plans to me? They'd be a little less likely to be lost in any excitement. And all that money of yours, Dave—it doesn't sound exactly Samaritan to say to a man you haven't seen for years: 'Give me your ten thou, and I'll carry it for you!'

"But if you want to gamble on my honesty I'll play banker for you."

"God bless you, Billy, you make me almost believe in heaven as well as the other place."

He was about to break down, but he gathered himself together with a brusque effort. He slapped his hand hard on the leather and leaped to his feet.

"I'll get those documents for you, Billy, this instant, and I'll hand you my money belt as soon as I can get it off."

He looked at Gaines' girth, and Gaines looked at his. The same thought struck both of them, and laughter shook away the gloom.

"Your money belt will have to be

pieced out about a yard to get round my equator," said Gaines. "It will be great sport for me, though. I'll know how it feels to be entirely surrounded by money."

Seeing that Jebb's dour face had softened a trifle—the fat are great consolers—Gaines made an effort to keep him diverted, and he began to laugh reminiscently.

"Say, Dave, do you remember, when we were cubs together at Yale, and one evening we were at—at——"

He was about to say "Moriarity's," but that had liquid connotations. He stopped short and gulped. "No, that wasn't the time." His memory switched to another incident—but that was Heublein's or Traeger's.

It seemed to him, as he tumbled out the pigeonholes of memory in his roll-top forehead, that he could find nothing recorded but cafés and carousals. He knew that they had played only a minute part in the total of college life, but because he wanted to avoid them he found them everywhere.

He tried to think of some athletic excitement, some classroom joke, some incident in the Catacombs, but the memory is not a voluntary muscle.

Upon the leaden silence came the fluty ripple of a childish voice:

"Hello!"

And an exquisite face peering through a cascade of curls was thrust into the fog of smoke.

"Nunkie Dave, are you dere?"

Jebb leaped to his feet and caught the child to him in alarm.

"How did you get here, sweetheart?"

"I just come 'long de hall, Nunkie Dave."

"She calls me Nunkie Dave," he explained. "It's shorter than Mr. Jebb. Cynthia, this is an old friend of your Nunkie Dave's. Miss Cynthia Thatcher, may I present to you Mr. William Gaines? There's a good deal of him, but it's all wool and a yard wide."

"And it washes," said Gaines. He knew better than to patronize the young. He said without condescension, but with perfect gravity, as he put out his hand:

"I'm delighted to meet you, Miss Thatcher. Won't you come and sit on my lap?"

She looked at him in dismay. His fair, round, capon-lined torso was like a globe. She murmured:

"I'm delighted to meet you, too, Mitha Gaines, but you got no lap to thet on." Then she took command. "If you move ober I like thee out de vinda."

"By all means, Miss Thatcher."

And Gaines hunched his hulk aside, far enough for the little queen to establish herself at the pane.

"You'll find the landscape pretty ugly," he said, "though there is a rather funny cow—looks as if it were cut out of calico."

Later he offered her his watch, a gold one with twinkling wheels and jewels like eyes under a glass case to protect them from children's poky fingers.

The child waved the timepiece about with a recklessness that came as near to upsetting Gaines as anything could. He reached out and resumed possession. Cynthia looked at him with scorn; then, flinging herself upon Jebb, dragged forth his watch and flaunted it before Gaines.

"Nunkie Dave alluth gives me his wath and says: 'Go ahead and drive nailth with it.' Don't you, Nunkie?"

"Well, you see, Cynthia, my watch isn't gold like Uncle Billy's," and he sighed over her curls. "I don't dare own a decent watch, Billy. I give 'em away—you know."

Gaines endeavored to pacify the despot.

"What did your Nunkie Dave say your name was?"

"My name Thinthy Sashel."

Gaines threw up his hands in horror. "Thinthy Suitcase!"

The child shrieked with joy at the big man's stupidity. She corrected him as if he were an overgrown infant—"Thinthy Sashel" was the name and no other.

"That's a beautiful name," said Gaines meekly, "the beautifullest name for about the beautifullest girl I ever saw."

She threw a look of confused vanity at Jebb, then flattened her tiny snub of a nose against the pane, as if to refute the compliment, and watched the quickening sights as the train rattled into a village.

Behind her back the men fell to talking about her.

"Cynthia Thatcher! That's a great name for a child," said Gaines. "She'll be an old woman before she learns to pronounce it."

But Jebb was gazing at her very solemnly.

"Poor little tike! Her history begins with a rush. She's only five, and she has already crossed the ocean, bidden her mother a long good-by, lost her father forever, been left alone among strangers in a land whose language she doesn't understand.

"And now she is sent back across the ocean, in charge of a—a man like me. We've become great chums already. She likes me, and I—I love her.

"I've never had a child of my own, Billy. I never expect to have. But I've helped so many children into the world, and I've had so many children brought to me maimed and twisted and defective and wounded and sick.

"And they've been so afraid of me, and I've had to hurt them so. And sometimes I couldn't help them at all, and I've had to see them slip away from me like little drowning, frightened things.

"This is the first child, Billy, ever put in my keeping that was sound and

well and beautiful and not meant for my horrible knives.

"I was so happy to have her. I scorned the idea of a nurse. Of course my training has taught me more about children than all the nurses on earth.

"And we set out like two children on a junket. I was her Nunkie Dave and she was my little Cynthy.

"And then that sot lurched into me—poor dog! Perhaps he's like me—a decent fellow nine-tenths of the time, and heartbroken with an affliction he couldn't any more help than a dwarf can help his size.

"But he's finished me. It's a tough world, Billy. The only decent thing fate has done for me is to show me you."

He reached out, and their left hands met—in no secret clutch—but in the firm, frank grip of the universal brotherhood.

Meanwhile Miss Thatcher was trying to drown the racket of the wheels under a song which she shouted into the pane with all the power of her lungs:

"I had a ickel po-nee,
Hith name wath Dappie Gway.
I len tim to a la-dee
To wide a mile away.
She fipped him, she latbed him,
She dwove him froo the mi-ah;
I would not lend my pony now-wow,
Faw rall that ladyth hi-ah."

At about the twentieth repetition of the little epic the pony stuck in the mire as the train joggled up to a short stop.

Outside the window was a small station. Some trifling accident or a train dispatcher's signal had caused the delay. The crew did not descend or open the doors. The guards had no explanations to vouchsafe, though watches were out in all the compartments and passengers were worrying lest the halt compromise their chances of making the boat to America.

Jebb was most nervous of all. He raised his window and poked his head out. There was no one to question.

He went into the corridor to ask the guards. His only answer was blunt "*Weiss nichts*," accompanied by a convincing look of stupidity. Jebb went back to his seat and played a devil's tattoo on the leather.

"I hope to the Lord nothing happens to hold us here long, Billy," he wailed almost childishly. "I'll not feel easy till I'm safe on shipboard. Of course I've got you now, but I want to be on board. I'll take the ship's doctor into my confidence and have him lock me up somewhere."

His all too-learned excitement was interrupted by the frenzy of the little girl. She had discovered that the station had a refreshment room, and the refreshment room had a window where fruits and candies were appealingly displayed.

"Oh, see de awnjes!" she cried. "Thinthy wants awnjes. Thinthy muth have awnjes. Nunkie must go get awnjes for poor ickle Thinthy."

Jebb answered: "Nunkie Dave would love to, sweetheart, but the train might start."

The argument carried little weight in the presence of the oranges.

"Nunkie run fast—buy quick—come back. Thinthy won't let naughty old train go!"

But Jebb shook his head and repeated his reasons. The child grew frantic. Jebb was dismal.

"I know just how you feel, honey," said Jebb, "but I'm afraid to risk it."

Gaines, whose heart was as soft and big as his bulk suggested, smote his fat knees with his fat hands, and rose:

"I'll get you the oranges, Miss Thinthy Sashel."

Jebb checked him uneasily. "Nonsense, Billy, she doesn't need them. She oughtn't to have them. She——"

"Nonsense yourself! I can't see a lady perish like Miss Tantalus with oranges just out of her reach."

"But the train may start."

"I'll bet my hat we'll be here for a week. This is just the sort of place the train stays a long while in. Anyway, it's just a few steps."

He had squeezed past and was brushing both sides of the corridor before Jebb could restrain him. The car was vestibuled, but Gaines knew how to manipulate the door from within.

Then he skipped, as the fat skip, across to the refreshment counter and called for oranges. The woman in charge was out of sight. She was not easily summoned.

She did not understand Gaines' German. He picked out three oranges and brandished them with one hand while the other plunged into his pocket. He had no small money. He found a bill. The woman went for the change. Her motives for leisureliness might be suspected. Gaines suspected them. He kept calling her and dancing impatiently.

Eying the engine always, he did not notice that a guard passing through the train and finding the vestibule door open, growled, glanced out, saw no one at hand, growled again, and slammed it from within.

Suddenly the train started. Gaines left the change to the woman, dashed to the door, found it closed without handle or foothold.

His disgusted face was swept by the window and past the staring, horrified face of Jebb.

Jebb thrust his head out and watched the smooth long side of the train glide with increasing speed past the bewildered Gaines, who searched and clutched in vain, and was left staring, the costly golden oranges dropping from his hands and bouncing uselessly about the platform.

CHAPTER III.

THE LONG HIKE.

IN the hurrying crisis of his affairs the loss of Gaines' protection stamped Jebb's usually superb self-control. His sorrow for Gaines' mishap was nothing to his fear for himself and the child.

He dashed to the corridor, shouting to the guard to signal the train to stop. The guard was slow to be found and slower to understand; and, once understanding, was aghast at the lese majesty of stopping one of the kaiser's trains simply to pick up a passenger.

Besides, yet had not the passenger all rules disobeyed, and from the train without permission at a not regular station descended?

Jebb would have stopped the train himself at whatever risk of fine and imprisonment, but there was no bell rope to pull, and he had failed to note the device employed.

His wrath and his anxiety and the necessity of putting them into German choked him. He was frantic with fear, not for himself, but for the child, whose destinies were once more entirely in his untrustworthy hands.

Cynthia had come out into the corridor and was staring at him in such bewilderment that she forgot to be-moan her oranges.

Jebb's face was pitiful. He could not trust his own soul. That is a lonely and a fearsome plight.

As he stood, alternately wringing his hands and pleading with the wooden-headed guard, the train, leaping forward toward full headway to make up the lost time, took a sharp curve at high speed, and lurched round it, hurtling the child violently along the corridor.

Jebb put out one arm to catch her. He put his other hand against the nearest support to steady himself, just as the whipcord snap of the cars sent a heavy door sliding shut.

Its whole impact fell horribly on Jebb's thumb. He managed to pull the door back enough to release his hand. He was used to the sight of other people's wounds, but the vision of his own macerated flesh, and the peculiarly exquisite anguish of a mashed thumb sent a queasy thrill to his stomach.

His knees went to sand. He fainted and came toppling and bumping to the floor, where the careening train rolled him like a loose barrel.

Cynthia screamed.

Passengers appeared at all the doors and jammed the corridor. A woman wrapped her arms about the distracted child, who was sobbing:

"Nunkie Davey's dead! Nunkie Davey's dead!"

A man knelt and raised his head.

"He's fainted, that's all. Has anybody got any brandy?"

As Cynthia was withdrawn from the scene, a Frenchman produced a flask:

"Je n'ai pas de brandee, monsieur, mais voici du cognac."

"Même chose, monseer," said the American as he pried Jebb's set teeth apart and poured a liberal potion into his clenched throat.

A shiver quaked through Jebb's whole length; he strangled, gulped, opened his eyes, looked about feebly.

"What's the matter?"

"You smashed your thumb, old boy, and keeled over. Monseer here had some brandy handy, and I forced it on you."

"No, no!" gasped Jebb helplessly. "Not brandy!"

"Yes, and good, too, by the sniff of it. You look a little green, old man. Have some more?"

"No!" cried Jebb as he pushed it away.

"You better," said the Yankee, holding it under his nostrils.

"Yes," said Jebb with a deep breath. He seized the flask greedily and took a generous draft. He offered it back,

but, as the Frenchman put out his hand, Jebb reconsidered and set the bottle to his lips again.

"*En servez-vous?*" said the Frenchman ironically.

Jebb took him literally and helped himself liberally.

"You must have a copper-lined throat," said the Yankee, "to swig it straight!"

Jebb gave a further demonstration of his prowess. He sat upon the floor of the car, and, winking conceitedly at his fellow countryman, drank his good health.

When the flask was again in his hands the Frenchman turned it upside down with a rueful countenance. Only a drop or two leaked from it. With angry irony he said:

"*Je vous remercie pour le flacon.*"

"Huh?" said Jebb.

The Yankee interpreted with a laugh as he got Jebb to his feet.

"Monsieur says he's much obliged for the flask."

Jebb threw his victim an ugly look, drove his fist deep into his pocket, and with a sneer offered a handful of money to the Frenchman.

"I pay for what I drink. How much?"

The Gaul understood without translation. He struck Jebb's hand aside, and the money jingled on the floor.

Jebb was for trouncing him then and there, but the Yankee held him, pacified him, and guided him along the corridor to his own compartment.

Jebb swayed a good deal, but it may have been the train. He dropped into his seat, dazed. But it may have been the dizziness of his suffering.

The Yankee brought him the scared little girl and the money which he had gathered up in the corridor with the instinct that leads people to pick up other people's runaway hats for them.

Jebb thanked him for the little girl,

but waved the money away magnificently.

"What's a little silver to me?" he said a trifle thickly.

The American laughed, and, laying the money on the seat, vanished to his own apartment.

Jebb wrapped his unsterilized handkerchief about his bleeding thumb. It was shrieking and throbbing, but an unleashed demon within him was shrieking and throbbing, too. He was sick, sick, too grievously tormented to bind his own wound properly.

Cynthia was disappointed at the concealment of so fascinating an object as a sore thumb, but when she caught sight of the white face beaded with the sweat of struggle her little heart ached with sympathy.

She cuddled close, reaching her little hands high and drawing them across his cold brow like flowers. She mothered him as best she could, and he clung to her almost more to be protected than to protect.

But through his head kept running the tune she had set going. Over and over to the clickety jig of the wheels he found himself humming: "I had a little pony, I had a little pony." Only it was a pony of brandy he had.

It was a grim pun, such as the old Hebrew prophets might have loved. And he wondered through what mire his pony might lead him. The pony became a wild horse and he Mazeppa.

After Cynthia had wasted a long and weary while of tenderness upon the wretch whose torment was so much beyond her comprehension, she grew fretful on her own account and began to ask for a story. "Tell me a story, Nunkie Dave."

"I don't know any new ones, honey."

"Tell me an old one."

"Not just now, honey—a little later, please."

A few moments of restlessness seemed a long while later to the child,

and she took up the old nursery litany again:

"Tell me a story, please; tell Thinthy a story."

"I'm trying to think of one."

The most pathetic cartoon I ever saw, I think, was published in France after Dreyfus had returned from his inferno. His two children hung across his knees and pleaded up into his emaciated face:

"*Une histoire, père!*"

So Cynthia hung upon the heart of Jebb and babbled:

"Tell me a story; tell me a story!"

Such stories as he might have told! And they were all he could think of.

She harried him in vain until she thought of one herself. Perhaps the wheeling rug of the level lands outside the window suggested it.

"Tell Thinthy about madic carpet."

From his chaotic remembrance of that tangled chaos of countless-colored skeins, "The Arabian Nights," Jebb brought out a twisted yarn.

"Once upon a time there was a poor old sailor named Sindbad, and he was sailing across Sahara in a ship of the desert, that is—the back of a camel—you've seen 'em at circuses."

"Oh, yeth, I know—he has two tails, one on his nose and one on his back and he has—no, that's a nelephink. What's a camel like, Nunkie Dave?"

"Well, a camel is something like a giraffe with a couple of feather beds on his back. But as I was saying, Mr. Sindbad he was sitting on the camel's hump and smoking a long hubbledy-bubbledy pipe, and thinking——"

"What was the camelth name, Nunkie Dave?"

"His name was Dapple Gray."

"No, no! Thath pony's name."

"Oh, excuse me, the camel's name was Clarence, I think. And he was thinking of his beautiful little daughter."

"Oh, did the camel have a daughter?"

"No, it's Sindbad I'm speaking of."

"What wath her name, Nunkie Dave?"

"The daughter's name was Bridget, I believe—or Patricia, I forget which."

"I like Bridthet better. Where did little girl live?"

"See here, young lady, am I telling a story or answering questions? If you're not careful I'll make you tell the story."

"Scoothe me, Nunkie, but where did little Bridthet live?"

"She lived in Constantinople, I believe. Can you spell it?" The curls shook violently. "It's a *C* and an *I* and a *constanti*, and a *steeple* and *stople* and a *constantinople*."

This lyric nonsense entranced the child, and she had to learn it. But, once mastered, she was hot on the trail of "Thimpat the Thailor." And she forced the frantic mind of Jebb back into the harness. He went on:

"Well, as Sindbad was sailing across the sand and sailing across the sand *and* a-sailing across the sand what should he see ahead of him but a—a bottle."

The word was out and it was like a knife in Jebb's heart. But he churned on:

"So Sindbad said to the camel: 'Whoa, Dobbin!'"

With the fanatic accuracy of a child in matters of narrative, she insisted:

"But you thaid hith name was Clarence."

"That's right. He said, 'Whoa, Clarence,' and Clarence whoa'd, and Sindbad threw out the rope fire escape and climbed down and tied Clarence to a hitching post that happened to be standing there, and he picked up the bottle and pulled out the cork with a corkscrew he always carried, and as soon as the cork was out, what do you suppose popped out of the bottle?"

"Milk?"

"Not milk but a—ugh!—a genie!"

"Whath a genie, somethink to dwink?"

"Not much! A genie is—well, it's—a—er—see that big cloud out there that looks like a giant on a draft horse? Well, a genie is a terrible being as big as that—a kind of a horrible fairy goblin demon. And he had been corked up in that bottle by an old magician, and he was just aching for some poor fool—er—fellow to come along and pull the cork so that he could chew him up."

"Wooh!" gasped Cynthia, cuddling closer.

"That's what the genie said: 'Wooh!' You see he had been locked up there about three million hundred years and he was hungry and he was just going to gobble Sindbad up when——"

"Umm! Did Mr. Thinpat get scared?"

"Scared! His teeth went clickety-click like this train. But, just as the genie was sprinkling some salt on him to make him taste better, Sindbad happened to remember the right charm. He waved his wand and yelled: 'Abracadabra, presto—change-o—snicker-snee!'

"And you should have seen that genie wilt; He got down on the ground and said: 'Please, Massa Sindbad, don't put me in the bottle no more. Let me work for you.'

"You see, Cynthia, some people have the magic charm, and they can make the bottle genie work for them and cheer them up and be their slave, but other poor fellows don't know the word, and they become the genie's slaves."

Cynthia, like most of her sex, was not for moralizing, but for plot.

"What did Mr. Thinpat do then to the poor 'fraid genie?"

"He said: 'Look here, you black rascal, I want to get home and see my little daughter Susie——'"

"Her name ith Bridthet."

"My daughter Bridget, and I want to get home quick. D'you understand?"

And the genie said: 'Yes, Massa Sindbad, you're agoing to be da in a jiffy.'"

"Whath a jiffy, Nunkie?"

"That's something I never could find out, honey. But the genie knew and he brought out a magic carpet."

"Did he have it in his pocket?"

"He must have had."

"How could he get a carpet in a bottle?"

"You'll have to ask him. Genies are very peculiar. But he brought it out and spread it on the ground, and said: 'All aboard!' And Sindbad stepped on it, and the genie said: 'Hold fast!' and rang the bell twice, and the next moment Sindbad found himself at home in Constantinople, and his little girl—what do you suppose was the first thing she said?"

"She said: 'What did you bring me for a present?'"

"That's just what she said. And her father said to the genie: 'Here, you black rascal, what did we bring the little girl?' And the genie took out of his suit case the most beautiful—— But here we are at Cologne, honey. Let's get out and take a breath of air and see the cathedral."

Cynthia, like many another, cared more for the architecture of event than of stone. She insisted:

"But what did the genie bring the little girl?"

"We'll open the suit case when the train starts again. It will do us good, honey, to stretch our legs a bit."

Jebb was impatient to be moving. He felt that if he sat in the car another moment he would leap through the window and take the glass flying.

Grasping Cynthia by the hand, he descended from the car, leaving all their hand luggage except the small Gladstone containing the precious drawings. This he carried in gingerly manner, his turbaned thumb yelping with pain at the slightest jar.

Learning that the train would rest at

Cologne some minutes, he struck out across the platform. Cynthia was hungry; the loss of the oranges had whetted her appetite. There was a refreshment room in the station, but Jebb thought they would better step outside and take a look at the cathedral towering above them like a storm cloud.

Of all the eyes that have stared at that carven mountain in the many centuries since it began to upheave its mass above the town, not many eyes could have regarded it with less observation.

The child's thoughts were turned inward upon the fascinating mysteries of the gift that the genie brought to Miss Bridget Sindbad. Jebb's eyes ran here and there like foxes in a cage, with the restlessness of a man in torment.

His shifty gaze was caught by the sign of the Dom-Hotel, with the coffee house adjoining.

People were seated at tables. Some of them were reading the papers one finds there. All of them had some liquor before them. Jebb shivered with desire; his knees wavered. The genie of alcohol was fuming from the bottle, and he knew no subduing charm.

It usurped his will. He could not wish to subdue it. Everything on earth became a mirage, the two things real were the thirst consuming him and the relief at hand.

Throwing off irresolution as something contemptible, he stalked majestically across the street, the little girl toddling alongside.

She never questioned the probity of her guide. If she felt a little fear that they were going too far it was lost in her trust of Nunkie Dave. She made one comment as her feet pattered across the rough cobbles of the city:

"It don't thmell like cologne, Nunkie Dave."

A voice came from his high-held head:

"So Coleridge said, honey."

She panted as she ran:

"Who was he, Nunkie Dave?"

"He was the man who wrote the 'Ancient Mariner.'"

"Who was he, Nunkie Dave?"

"He was the man who slew the albatross."

"Whath a albatroth, Nunkie Dave?"

"It was a beautiful bird, honey, and the man that killed it suffered horribly of thirst. You must never, never slay the albatross, honey—never slay the albatross. It's the unpardonable crime."

Strolling along the Domhof, by now he had reached the Dom-Hotel, walking as if in a trance.

He took the child to the dining room, told a waiter to bring her what she wanted, cautioned her not to stir till he came back, and, kissing her good-by, made straight for the wine room.

Cynthia had never heard of Casabianca, but she shared his grit. She and the waiter, who spoke a little dining-room English, and had five or six *Kinder* of his own, became great friends.

It was a pleasanter place to wait than on a burning deck, but Cynthia's appetite was soon sated, the waiter speedily emptied his English vocabulary, and his bag of tricks for amusing a child jaded with delay.

And still Jebb did not return. Loneliness for her playmate, and terror for his loss, agitated the child, and she was fretting.

"I want Nunkie Dave! I want Nunkie Dave!" And then, that cry failing, she began to whimper:

"I want my mamma!"

At last Jebb arrived at the door of the dining room. Cynthia precipitated herself across the floor with a shriek of joy that disturbed the solemn philosophers looking for truth at the bottom of a stein.

The waiter followed to explain with much joviality and some policy how long and well he had entertained his charge.

Jebb, with a remarkable magnificence of manner, called for the reckoning and paid it with a gold piece of ten marks, and bade him keep the change.

The rain of gold had begun. Mr. Croesus was himself again.

Leaving the voluminous waiter palpitant with admiration, Jebb took Cynthia's hand and they went back to the station. In his other hand he still grasped the Gladstone.

His manner to the child was one of lofty tenderness, of the courtesy an ancient knight would have shown a ladye of high degree, mingled with the absent-mindedness of a poet whose thoughts were busied with some great theme.

"Seems to me, honey, that the train was headed other way when we left. Prob'ly—prob-ab-ly I'm mistaken. Get turned round easily in foreign countries."

In his eagerness to board the train he tried to walk over and through a gorgeous officer who looked to, be at least a taker of cities instead of tickets. On demand Jebb brought out his pocketbook and produced the remainder of a ticket and a half to Ostend.

He was informed that his train was "*vor langer Zeit gegangen.*"

With an air of angelic patience Jebb informed the man, whom he called "*mein lieber General*" that he desired and intended to take the train standing before him.

The guard, greatly touched by the title—he had been a soldier, of course—informed the distinguished sir that the train was no longer the Nord Express, but the Ostend-Vienna Express, and that other tickets would be required.

Jebb replied that that made nothing to him out, and went to the ticket office where, in German of surprising correctness, he called for one and one-half tickets. The man in the cage naturally

inquired, though in less aristocratic German:

"Please, for what station, my sir?"

Jebb smiled airily and quoted a remembered line:

"What stations have you?"

The beard within waved like wind-swept grain, and the ticket seller answered with a laugh:

"Frankfort-am-Main, Homburg, Nauheim, Wiesbaden, Schwalbach, Ems, Würzburg."

"Würzburg, eh? That tastes good to me."

The ticket seller beamed as into a stein, and managed to get the tickets ready in time for the guards to hustle Jebb aboard, with the child's wrist always in one hand, the Gladstone in the other.

The three were no sooner bestowed in an apartment than Cynthia began on Jebb:

"Now tell me what was in the thoot cathe, Nunkie Davey."

"What suit case, honey?"

"The thoot cathe the genie bwrought."

"What genie, honey? What's a genie anyway?"

"Why, heth a terrible fairy like a giant. Thinpat the Thailor finded him in a bottle."

"Found genie in a bottle, eh? That reminds me."

He opened the Gladstone and fumbled among the papers, found a flask, which he uncorked and put to his lips with a nonchalant salute.

"Here's good health to the genie in the bottle."

He restored the cork to the flask and the flask to the bag. Then he turned to the child with the curious eyes of one gradually waking:

"Why, hello, little girl! Where did you come from?"

"I been here all de time."

"You have! I just noticed you. What's your name, li'l' girl?"

"My name Thinthy Sashel."

Jebb giggled like a silly schoolboy.

"That's funniest name I ever heard. But I'm pleased to meet you."

He put out his hand with its grotesquely swaddled thumb, but the child shrank back.

"Don't be afraid. That thing on my hand isn't a doll. It's just my funny old thu-thumb."

But the child huddled away, wide-eyed, afraid not of him, but of the new tenant that had usurped his habitation.

CHAPTER IV.

THE STRANGER IN A STRANGE LAND.

HOVERING a little this side of sleep, his drowsy eyes saw, or seemed to see, through a window of quaint and alien design a distant tower of soaring stature.

At its topmost tip the rising sun had set a rose in bloom. The rest of the slim shaft was still enveloped in the violet shadow of vanishing night.

In a balcony circling the tower he rather imagined than descried a mote of a figure, and rather dreamed than heard a voice far, far away and crying: "*Allahu, Akbar! Allahu Akbar! Al-lahu Akbar! Allahu Akbar!*"

It was only on its fourth intonation that he made out the words, and then they meant nothing to him.

There followed a chant in the same strange language, so mellowed by remoteness that it interwove with the dream rug on the loom of Jebb's drowsiness.

The words were strange, and there was no meaning, only a foreign music, in that concluding phrase: "Prayer is better than sleep," which the drowsy and dubious muezzin, weary of the steep spiral stairway, adds to the sunrise Azan.

The voice died, the speck vanished from the balcony, the rose glow crept down the shaft, and still Jebb wavered ambiguous between sleep and waking.

At length he heard a sound that was real, familiar, out of boyhood, the bawling of sheep driven afield.

But even this was rendered unfamiliar, for the muffled thud of the many-footed huddle through the dust furnished a sort of drum accompaniment for a lone flute played with barbaric melancholy to a tune that was simply monotony endlessly repeated.

The sheep suggested home, but the flute music was so curious that Jebb shook the trouble of slumber from his eyes and resolved himself awake. He had a sense of having overslept.

When his eyes actually perceived the minaret through the latticed window and made out what manner of room he was in, he sat up with a start. He fell back immediately. His nerves jangled like a harp thrown to the floor.

To move his head ever so slightly was to put himself on the rack, but curiosity forced him to endure the turning of his face so that he could study his whereabouts. Wonder filled him till he thought he was back in a dream.

The last thing he remembered was a sense of drowsiness on a train in Germany. But this was neither a train, nor Germany.

At the window a cluster of wistaria urged in by the dawn breeze was waving a purple censer, sprinkling perfume his way.

"This is Japan," thought Jebb, who had never been there.

Further reconnoiter denied the testimony of his nostrils. He lay on a sort of wall platform on which a heap of cotton mattresses had been spread. The coverings over him were of delicate fabric.

The room was devoid of furniture other than two low tables decorated with inlaid mother-of-pearl, and a divan intricately carved and richly cushioned. On the floor were many rugs tinted like heaps of autumnal leaves. Their de-

sign and the architecture of doors and window converted Jebb from Japan.

"This is Persia," he concluded, thinking of the rugs. And he had never been to Persia.

There was such luxury in the lilt of the morning wind, the diminishing languor of the shepherd's flute, the nodding flowers, and the sense of having slept a little too long that Jebb decided to sleep a little longer.

At some vaguely later period, he thought he heard the creak of an opened door, and his own leaden eyelids seemed to creak as he heaved them ajar.

The door was indeed slightly opened, and peering into the room was a face that seemed hardly more than a grotesque mask hung there. It was the black and glistening skull of a negroid—something more than a negro and less than a man.

Jebb stared. The man stared. Then, seeing that Jebb was awake, he came into the room chattering in a high, shrill voice a strange gibberish which led Jebb to change Persia to India—or perhaps Egypt.

The fellow was uncanny, unnatural. He seemed very tall, yet his body was short and fat. It was his arms and legs that were long, and spiderishly so.

His flabby face was beardless and withered like a frozen apple. His eye, small in his big face like an elephant's, look upon Jebb with a shifty treachery that belied the loose-lipped grind of subservience. His spirit was that of a cowardly hospitality, a cunning welcome.

Jebb felt ill omen in the manner of the creature, and rose to an elbow to meet him. But the blood flashed to his head and he almost swooned to the couch.

The black seemed rather crestfallen than encouraged at Jebb's weakness, and this added to his mystery.

Leaving his slippers outside the door,

the fellow padded over to Jebb, and with soft fat hands adjusted the pillow under his head.

"He wants me to die comfortably," sighed Jebb helplessly.

Then the man shuffled back to the corridor and lugged in a brazier full of glowing charcoal. Squatting about it, he began to brew an ebon sirup. The voluminous aroma floating from it announced it as coffee.

"Poisoned, no doubt," thought Jebb. But he was so sick that he did not much care.

The coffee was brought to him in a tiny brass cup, and the deference of the slave was so full of ill-smothered hatred that Jebb's suspicion was confirmed. But his stomach cried aloud for drink, and in any case he was completely in the power of the huge spider.

He tasted the coffee with a physician's tongue for drugs, but it was so stout a liquor that it would have disguised quinine. Jebb drained the thick, dusty fluid, and found means to ask for more—then more.

The compliment implied brought a reluctant smile to the face of his keeper. This encouraged Jebb to ask:

"Where am I? How did I get here? What country is this? Who are you?"

But the answer was the same falsetto gibberish in which Jebb, who was something of a linguist, could find no kinship to any language of his acquaintance.

When Jebb had refused his fourth cup, the slave urged him to his feet. But when he was half erect his head quivered and tolled like the cracked Liberty Bell swaying and beaten with a clapper.

Jebb noticed now that he was clothed neither in his street suit nor in his pajamas, but in a garment he could not recognize.

His hands, remembering a habit he had acquired and lost, went convul-

sively to his waist. His money belt was gone, his ten thousand dollars had evaporated—and the belt with it.

“Where are my clothes?” he demanded, and again in bad German: “*Wo sind mein Kleider?*” and in tourist French: “*Ou sont mes habits?*”

But the black only gibbered, and, gathering him in his arms, carried him, with much grunting, out into the corridor, along it to a door, and into a little antechamber to a room of marble with a pool of running water.

To Jebb’s confusion, the slave gave him insistent assistance in the bath and scrubbed him down with great towels like sublime currycombs. The room and the towels gave Jebb a new clew.

Wherever he might be, there was no mistaking Turkish towels, but when he said: Turkey? Toorkey? Toorkee?” the black only shook his head and reeled off more counter tenor. Jebb realized that Turkish towels were indefinite. He had found them in Dubuque.

Then he was wrapped up again, carried back to his room, and deposited on a wall divan. Reclining in a glow of well-being, Jebb watched his keeper whisk the bedclothes from what was late his couch, fold them, and stuff them into a cupboard, when he drew a gorgeous silk rug and spread it in their place.

Jebb supposed that the fellow was a slave. Still, he might be King Menelik for all Jebb knew. Yet he believed that Menelik wore a beard. This man never had and never would have a beard. A great convenience—other things being equal.

He disappeared for a while, then trotted back with a brass ewer and bowl, more towels, soap, perfume, brushes, and a smallish weapon of glistening steel and evident edge.

Jebb was stronger, but not yet strong enough for battle. He was somewhat reassured at having his jaws lathered with fragrant soap, but he was some-

what squeamish about bending his head back and baring his throat to the blade.

Nevertheless he came through the ordeal with no more damage than a dull razor inflicts. Delathered, perfumed, and dried, Jebb felt still better. As he grew stronger, so did his curiosity.

Then the fellow backed out, as from a presence, with many a long salaam. Left alone to meditation, Jebb glanced idly down and noted that his thumb wore a deep scar.

His experienced eye showed him what sort of cicatrice it was. He remembered the accident on the train. But who had lanced his thumb? And when? Where? Why?

The wound had already healed. It must have been days ago. And on the little finger of his left hand glowed a ring, a ring with a cloudy stone of great size and evident price, rimmed about with diamonds.

He could not imagine how he could have come by it. It looked to be a woman’s ring. Had he gained it by robbery or murder, or had he paid his ten thousand dollars for it? It might be a love token—but whose?

His head ached with wondering. From the buzzing noises within his cranium a little tune began to detach itself. There were words to it, but it was some time before they became coherent.

At last he made them out, as they ran through his head in an infantile dialect:

I had a ickle po-nee,
Hith name wath Dappie Gway.
I len tim to a la-dee
To wide a mile a-way—

The song died in a jangle as terror, remorse, and wonderment clamored in his brain. A long, long night had intervened between the Yesterday when Gaines’ white face had swept past the car window and the Morning After when the black face had floated into his dreams.

He remembered the loss of Gaines. He remembered Cologne. Dimly he remembered the difficulty about the tickets. He had a shadowy recollection of his haughty departure in the wrong direction. He smiled bitterly as he recognized the lofty insolence of his other self.

To that point he could trace his actions, the child, the Gladstone bag. From that point his soul was steeped in Lethe.

He had found himself at last, but where was the little girl, the trusting child that had cuddled to him and begged for a story?

Groping in the depths of his memory, he was reminded of another time when a child fell off a pier after dark and he dived and dived and dived in the night within night of the black waters, and dived in vain.

Thinking of that child, a stranger's child he had never known at all, he was reminded of Cynthia, whom he had known for so short a while. In what black waters was her little body swirling? Where and how should he find her again?

But the blackamoor had returned, carrying on his arm a long house robe of heavy silk. In his hands were slippers. Jebb seized him by the soft shoulder and cried:

"Where is the little child who was with me?"

The doughy face grinned up into his, and answered without understanding, in words not to be understood.

Jebb tried all his languages.

"Child! Little girl! *Petite fille!* *Enfant!* *Kleines Mädchen!* *Bambino!* *Figlia!*

He made gestures, gave imitations of a child's voice and manner, but the face of the black was as empty of answer as his mouth was full of empty words.

With a kind of servile tyranny, he forced the distracted weakling to slip his arms into the sleeve of the robe,

and his bare feet into his slippers—if they might be flattered by the term slippers; for, though they were carved and ornamented with silver, they were but flag clogs shaped with a hatchet and carrying only a strap.

They were meant rather to be slipped off easily than kept on securely, and Jebb's feet had never been prehensile.

He set out freely enough, but stepped on his own toes, and, stumbling like a man making a *début* on roller skates, felt again such an onrush of weakness, or rather such an outrush of strength, that he would have fainted to the floor had not the burly fellow caught him up again and toted him through the door and up the corridor, but this time to another door.

He thrust it open with Jebb's feet, from whose toes the oaken clogs still dangled by their straps.

The new room was walled in with varicolored ground glass. The full forenoon sun streamed through its translucence, and it was like being inside the perianth of a huge and beautiful flower.

Jebb was placed upon a low divan, and a silken cloth as many-hued as Joseph's coat spread over him. And then he was alone again. The radiant charm of the place hardly stirred a feeling in his mind. He was occupied with plainer business.

His eyes roved listlessly through an open window to a walled garden, the tops of whose trees shouldered above the sill.

There were mulberry trees dark with long berries, and acacias, cypresses, and pines. And trees which he could not name—terebinth and plane.

And up from the walled inclosure came the scent of more flowers, tangled perfumes, a chaos of savors, from fruits, shrubs, and vegetables grown all together.

They had no spell for Jebb. He was thinking too hard to feel.

He knew well enough from the ache and exhaustion and the after-nausea of soul that his old enemy had had him in chains, but he was tormented almost beyond endurance with fear as to what trails the arch-fiend might have chosen for this latest Brocken ride.

To have a long and active period of his life obliterated from memory like names written in water, to know that he had been in strange places, busy among strange people, doing mad deeds on crazy impulse; and not to know where he had been, whom he had offended, or what he had done—was as nearly unbearable as anything can be in a world where all things are bearable.

He was haunted by a ghost, and the ghost was himself. Cold sweat broke out upon him as he wrestled with the clammy angel of oblivion.

Upon his torment, the door opened again. There was a sound of colloquy in the hall outside, of angry argument. He recognized the uncanny treble of the slave, and another voice, lower, yet a woman's voice.

The slave was evidently moved to protest, almost to active mutiny, servile always, yet determined, frantic. The woman's voice grew sterner and more excited, yet it was always beautiful.

The door opened wide, and the slave paused on the sill. His face was as livid as the ashes in the charcoal brazier, and his eyes flashed and roved in their sockets. But he made reluctant way for a figure that floated rather than walked, and floated straight from the pages of "The Thousand Nights and a Night."

Her costume was one great black cloud, from which none of her transpired, not even the half-sheltered eyes of the Orient.

Again the slave protested, and now a white hand, burdened with rings and with bracelets crowding to the wrist, came out in a gesture of command.

The slave oozed through the door and closed it, but as if he would cling to the other side.

Then the black veil came undulantly forward, and Jebb's ears were prepared to understand no more of her than his eyes could learn.

With a shock of rescue and delight he recognized his own language—undeniable English, only with an unusual musicking of the vowels, an unheard song in the intonation.

The veil bent and billowed in low curtsies, and through it came speech, with long pauses and gropings for the right word:

"The effendi has slept long, Allah be thanked, and, I hope, well also. I did afraid to waken the effendi lest it hurt his wandering soul to be made to hurry back, preferring perhaps to remaining in some land other and sweeter than this harsh place."

Jebb's wonder at his situation was so great that it swallowed up his lesser wonder at the apparition of this misty being with the melody voice.

Hearing his own language, his great unanswered question came crowding to the fore. He essayed a poor mimicry of the veil's salutations, tried to rise, and, failing, bowed his head and waved his hand in what was meant to be a chivalrous sweep.

Instinctively, hoping to make himself better understood, he spoke very loudly and in a foolish dialect:

"May me ask where me have pleasure to be?"

The answer came straight:

"The effendi is at Uskub."

"Uskub!" he gasped. "I never heard of Uskub. Where, please, is it?"

The veil fluttered with her laughter.

"Why, Uskub is here. It is in the vilayet of Kossovo—not far from Nish."

"Uskub! Nish!" he wailed. "Kossovo! Where am I? What is a vilayet? Why do you call me effendi? My name is Jebb."

She dropped to the floor, and her fingers clasped all their jewels in a gleaming mass about her knees as she rocked with childish glee. Coming from such a ghost in such an unheard-of region, her merriment was uncanny to Jebb.

"How on earth did I get here? If I am on earth."

The torment in his face routed her laughter, and she answered almost with tenderness:

"Djebb Effendi is on earth—very much on earth, but how he gets here, that is perhaps more a wonder to me as to the effendi. Perhaps in his time, Djebb Effendi weel inform me. I am but a woman; it is perhaps pardoned if I have a curiosity."

Jebb's plight was pitiful. "I don't know how I got here—I don't know where I am—or who you are. I don't believe I know my own name—or anything at all."

The voice mothered him now.

"Then I shall not derange the poor, weary effendi with the impertinence of to make questions. I tell you what I know.

"Last night there was great storm here in Uskub. See, in the garden the mimosa is shattered, the roses are wrecked, and the grass is covered with crimson snow. I was much afraid of the storm, but it is beautiful, too.

"I am watching through my window. I can just see the road over that high wall. Great flash of lightning comes and at the same time thunder. It did strike that pine tree which was once tall and is now breaked in two. In the light I see man—it was—the effendi.

"He is walk in the road. Whence you comed, I do' know. You are there. You look very wild and staggering. You fall down in the meedst of the road. Then darkness. I cry 'Ma-shallah!' for I thinked first of some *djinn*."

"Some gin?" echoed Jebb.

"Yes, *djinn*, the demon—you know."

Jebb nodded. It was "The Arabian Nights," after all.

She went on excitedly:

"I watch again and a new lightning shows the effendi lying still in the road, no demon, but poor seeck man. The rain breaks like the Bosphorus is turned upside down. I say to me: 'The poor man will be drowned or made dead of a chill or trampled by a buffalo.'"

"A buffalo?" gasped Jebb, shaking his head with a new perplexity. And she deepened his bewilderment by adding:

"Yes, a buffalo harnessed to a cart." Then she ran on, halting for words at times, yet volubly:

"I clap my hands hard. Djaffer who sleeps before my door—the same who is wait upon you this morning—he comes at my call.

"I tell him to bring poor effendi into house. Djaffer is scared. I command. He refuse. I command again, very hard. At last he goes out the gate and brings you in. I see you, you are very seeck and do not speak—only moan.

"I tell him to place you in a room and make you a bed and take your clothes to be made dry. All thees he does very secretly and terribly afraid."

"Why was he afraid, please?" Jebb ventured, everything adding to his befuddlement.

She evaded the question, perhaps from hospitality, he thought, and went on with a new tremor as if some of her slave's fears had crept into her own soul:

"I telled him to let the effendi sleep so long you will, for you are not strong. You have goed through a grand suffering, I theenk. This morning you slept until the sun rises at ten o'clock."

"The sun rose at ten o'clock!" said Jebb, shaking his head helplessly. "I give up." Then a new thought struck

him, the pleading little thought that had been crowded down by the bewilderments and obscure experiences clamoring through his aching head and his sick soul.

"But the child I had with me?"

"The child?" she echoed blankly.

"Yes, the little girl!"

"You have a young daughter, then?"

And the veil did not entirely strain out a tang of disappointment.

"She is not my daughter," he explained. "She is the child of a friend."

"Oh!" Even through the silken sieve there came a tone of relief.

Jebb did not heed it in his panic. "She was in my charge. I was taking her to America. She must have been with me. She—oh, she must have been with me!"

"You did had no child with you when I did see you in the storm. Djaffer, he say nothing of a child. Only you he find."

"But the little girl, the poor little waif. I must go hunt for her."

He rose to his feet, but his nerves flared and burned like live wires. His knees refused their office, and he would have gone crashing backward had she not risen swiftly, caught him in her arms, and eased him to the cushions.

He breathed deep of roses from her veils and her hair, but he breathed deeper of fear.

Through his mind raced visions of the little girl lost and alone, and running crying in the rain-flooded, lightning-smitten streets of this weird region of—did she say Uskub?

CHAPTER V.

THE YES-AND-NO WIFE.

THE hidden woman was soothing his brow with cool palms and was quieting him as if he were a child.

"Effendi must be most quiet, or he shall be much ill and perhaps die. I

go to send Djaffer to seerch the town for the little girl.

"If she is in Uskub or near, somebody shall know and he will bring her to you. And I shall tell him when he is there to go to a Christian shop and buy for you some wine, the best *niansta*—or some *raki*."

"Ah, no, I know—I readed in the books—it is wiskee that you Franks drink. Shall I not get for you of the wiskee? Our religion does not permit that we have it in the *kelar*."

"No, no. I hate it!" And the look of loathing on Jebb's face confirmed his words so forcefully that it banished from her head any possible inclination to impute his stupor to the notorious drunkenness of the infidel.

"But the child, the child!" Jebb cried. "My God, what have I done?"

And remorse crushed him as never before. "The last thing I remember the little girl's hand was in mine. I was telling her a story on the train—a story from 'The Arabian Nights,' and now I am here. No, I am nowhere. This is all a dream—a nightmare. I am still asleep on the train. I shall wake up and find her cuddling in my arm, asleep, too. I shall wake up! I must wake up!"

And he struggled to open wider his staring eyes.

"You are awake, Djebb Effendi. You shall find the little jasmine flower. The slave will return with her in just a leetle while. Please be quiet till I send him."

He closed his eyes under the soothe of her strangely potent prayer, and she clapped her hands. Instantly the door opened and the black was there.

Jebb did not look to see, but he heard a heated parley between mistress and servant. The servant was passionately resisting, or, rather, pleading, in his shrill treble against the determined commands of the woman.

At length there was silence, and the voice said:

"He is goed. He was afraid to leave me lest the other servants find you, but I did made him go, and to send my woman to bring food and to keep watch. He is goed now to bring you the little child. He will search the city as if it were a room."

Jebb, his head still throbbing with fear for Cynthia, asked absently:

"Why is he afraid that the other servants might find me?"

There was a long pause, and he opened his eyes to see that she was twisting her fingers anxiously, and her eyes were uneasy. But at length she said:

"It is perhaps kindest to tell Djebb Effendi everything. Last night my fear for you overcame all my other fears, all my reelegion, my duty. I thought only that some poor man goes to perish.

"I shall give to him shelter for the night in Allah's name. But this morning Djaffer tells me he has bringed the effendi of coffee, and gived him bath, but that he is very weak.

"I did hope—I mean I did thinked the effendi should be so well thees morning that after he did eat—he might—be able—he might"—she was groping for a delicate way of putting it—"be strong to go where he had wished to go.

"But Djaffer tells me you are too weak to walk, and I cannot even send you to a khan or to the house of a friend. He wish to put you again in the street. I resolve to come to see you for myself. Djaffer oppose me, he try to hold me back. He loves me much. He is horrified, afraid, and ashamed for me."

"Why?" said Jebb freely.

"I have crossed the *mabeyn*."

"The ma—what?"

"The hall between the *haremlik* and the *selamlik*."

"The more you tell me the less I know," said Jebb. "Won't you please explain to me in words of one syllable where I am, what country this is, whose house this is?"

There was a hint of peevishness in his voice, but once more her silken hands were venturing upon his flushed forehead.

"Djebb Effendi has much hungry. I theenk you listen better after you have of to eat. I dare not have such poor food as we have bringed by all the slaves, but only my own woman, if the effendi excuse."

She clapped her hands again, and a slave girl looked in, then entered carrying on her head a brass tray laden with strange dishes beautifully bedecked. She set down the tray, while she brought a low pearl-patterned table forward and placed it before Jebb.

Then on her knees she transferred the dishes from tray to taboret; fruits newly ravished from the orchard and with the night rain still sweet upon them, grapes among their own leaves and tendrils, olives, pistache nuts, lamb cut into tiny cubes, and strange com-potes.

She set out two tall goblets of gold and poured into them a cold sherbet luscious with the juice of peaches

The hostess dropped to the floor, curling her feet under her. The slave placed a basin before Jebb and motioning him to hold his hands over it, poured water from a brass pitcher upon them, and dried them with soft towels.

The hostess would not eat. She was horrified at Jebb's suggestion that she should feast with a stranger, but he wondered if the awkwardness of the veil had not something to do with her refusal.

She urged the food upon Jebb, but he had never been a breakfast ban-queter, and now his outraged stomach was sullen as an overdriven beast of burden, and it found little to attract it

in the multitude of little dishes save the chill sherbet.

But when the hostess, as a touch of exquisite hospitality, pushed back her sleeve, thrust her fingers into the dish, and lifted a titbit of lamb from the dish and held it to his lips, he could not refuse.

The welcome coffee brazier was again set in action, and by the time Jebb's hands had been laved again it was ready.

The hostess managed to slip one of the little brass cups under her veil, and she joined her guest in the coffee; and nibbled, too, at the cakes.

Besides, she produced a brochure of blank pages and an embroidered pouch of tobacco. She deftly rolled a cigarette, which she offered Jebb. He was more than ready to smoke. She looked as if she envied him the privilege, but the veil again forbade.

When the slave had lighted a match for Jebb's cigarette, the hostess motioned her from the room. The girl, glaring at the stranger, muttered something which sounded to Jebb like reproach and a warning.

The hostess got to her feet, ran after the girl, and caught her in her arms, caressing and cajoling her, calling her something that sounded like "daddy."

The slave withdrew, pacified, but not content. When the hostess was again on the floor with ankles crossed, Jebb followed a luxurious cloud of smoke with a genial comment:

"You are kind to your slaves here."

"And why not, effendi? She may be a mother of a sultan. Was not the mother of our glorious padishah—may the merciful grant him to live long—was not even his mother a slave? Was I not slave myself?"

"Was she? Were you—you a slave? Then this is Turkey I am in."

"But I did tell you. Uskub is in the vilayet of Kossovo."

"So I have got over into Asia."

"No, no. Turkey is also in Europe. You have not heard of Uskub? You have perhaps heard of Stamboul?"

"I've read of it in poems."

"You Franks call it Constantinople."

"Oh!" He remembered that he had been talking of that city to the little girl. Being one of his latest rational ideas, his alcoholic ego had doubtless made for the place.

"Uskub is far more western than Stamboul, two nights by train."

"Then there is a railroad here?"

"Oh, yes, as many trains as three every week to Stamboul, and one every day to Salonica!"

"Thank God for a railroad!"

To Jebb the news that he was in touch with the iron horse set him on the firm ground of reality.

He had cherished a vague notion that he had been carried to occult Uskub on the magic carpet or the back of the very genie he had been describing to the little girl. In his relief he felt it his duty to show some interest in his hostess. He said:

"But you were going to tell me why I brought you and your house in such danger."

"If my husband should find that I have talked with you he would kill us both."

"Your husband!" And now it was his turn to betray a flaw of regret. "You are married, then?"

"Yes and no."

"Yes and no?"

"My husband did not raise my veil after the ceremony. I was a gift wife, and unwelcome."

"A gift wife!" groaned Jebb. "I have a splitting headache."

She beat her palms on the floor and laughed till the tears streaked her veil. She was like a child, and Jebb studied her with a curiosity of growing tenderness.

"Shall I tell you who I am—from the beginning?" she asked.

"For Heaven's sake do, and may—what's his name—Allah bless you."

"For the first thing I am borned in Circassia. Miruma is my name. Mihr-u-mah, that ees the sun and the moon."

"Oho, you're a Circassian princess, eh?"

"Not a princess."

"That's refreshing. I thought all Circassian women were princesses. We've had so many in our circuses. And did you use to wear your hair in a big fluff?"

"I am not understanding."

"Well, that scores one for me. But please go on."

"My poor father is poor, and Allah sends him more child as wealth. But we live in mountains—the Caucasus peaks, and we do not need much. And then my poor father dies himself—Allah grant him bliss!—and my mother has no man, and five child.

"Follows some years of ugly poverty, and not much to eat. I am grow to have nine years. People tell my mother I am beautiful and shall become more. And I did, Mashallah, I was very beautiful till I became old woman."

"Are you an old woman?" said Jebb with a sigh. "Your voice and your hands do not seem old."

"But they are. I did pass my twenty-fiveth year last Shaban."

Jebb sighed again, a comfortable sigh, and added: "Could I have another cigarette?"

"You like my tobacco?" she cooed, and as her fingers twisted it she went on: "My mother sees that I shall be beautiful for a while and she sells me as slave."

"The brute!"

"Mashallah! No. She is good mother. She sells me to rich *hanum*, a lady who is terrible kind to me. In Turkey a woman slave who is pretty is treated wonderful kindly. Here is

your cigarette, effendi; may I give Djebb Effendi of fire?"

She lighted a match and shielded it in the cup of her exquisite palms. But his eyes, ignoring the match, were staring through her veil, trying to make out her features in the glow of the blaze upon her face.

But she had not donned the transparent mockeries the coquettes of Constantinople draw across their cheeks to reveal rather than conceal.

Miruma, venturing into a network of danger, had dared all risks except before her own conscience. The veil she wore was thick and opaque to Jebb's inquiring stare.

She noted his intense discourtesy, but laughed at it, feeling secure. When the blaze died before he could discern a feature she lighted another match with a gentle:

"Effendi did not make the light." Seeing him rebuked and puffing, she went on:

"It was much dangerous that voyage from Circassia, me very young, much afraid of the Black Sea. We are bringed in small boat in winter, for fear a warship of Russia shall make us captives. At last we reach Turkey."

Jebb felt himself on the familiar ground of old pictures and romances.

"And were you stood up in a slave market without any—er—so that any old villain of a merchant could come along and buy you?"

"Oh, no effendi!" she exclaimed. "The pooblic slave market is closed and forbidden for many, many years. But still slaves are selled. I am buyed by great lady—a rich *hanum*."

"Rich what, please?"

"*Hanum*—that means a lady, madame; same like *effendi* means monsieur, or what you call mister."

"Should I call you *hanum*, then? I'm finding it very awkward not to have something to call you."

"If you wish to be very respectable—"

or is it respectful?—you should call me *hanum effendi*.”

“But you tell me *effendi* means *monsieur*.”

“Yes, and *hanum effendi* means *monsieur madame*, or *mister missus*—it is very respectable. But I like better be called *joost madame*; it sound very educated.”

“All right, *hanum effendi*, I will call you *madame* sometimes, though I like *hanum effendi* better. It sounds more like you. But you were telling me how you were bought by the rich *hanum*.”

“Yes, and I am educate like as I am her own daughter child. I am teached the Engleesh, the *Français*, the Russian, the to play, to sing, to paint, to dance. I am become very wise lady.

“Five years I am live with this *hanum* like her bes’ belove’ child. One day I meeted wife of a bey; she tells her husban’ that I am beautiful, so much I must be maked as a present to the padishah heemself.

“So Raghieb Bey he buyed me and gived me to the padishah, on the anniversary of the *Kilidj-Alai*, when they did bind the great sword of Othman on him.”

“And who is the padishah?” said Jebb.

She gasped at this. “The padishah! You do not know who he is? *Mashallah*! He is the sultan, the greatest of all kings, the shadow of Allah on earth.”

“Oh!” from Jebb.

She shook her head in despair at his profound ignorance, and went on:

“So that was the way the poor Circassian slave which is me becomed a *seraili* in the *Yildiz Kiosk*. I who was slave did have slaves of my own, and jewels and beautiful silks, the gift of the padishah. And once I did see him.”

“You saw him once? Once!” said Jebb.

“Yes,” she sighed. “Once time only. He grant me a smile and graciously say

I am welcome, but never do I see him again. It was not Allah’s wish that the caliph should look upon me with favor.”

“The sultan is old, and he must be nearsighted,” said Jebb.

“*Mashallah*! Speak not so. If Allah had sended me the glory of the padishah’s favor, and then a leetle child, I should have becomed one of the wives, and my child perhaps some day himself a padishah.”

Somehow Jebb could not share the regret that led her gaze through the lattice and off to the unattainable clouds massed in the blue sky like the sunlit mosques of seven-hilled *Stamboul*.

“A year I did lived in the harem of the caliph, and then the *Valideh sultana* tells that I am again to be gived away as a present, this time to a pasha and to be really a wife.

“My heart leap up for, of course, a woman is nothing if Allah does not make her the priceless gift of a child, a man child. My new husband is then great man rising in the world like the sun himself. But sometimes the clouds come before the sun reach his zenith at six o’clock.”

Jebb only cast his eyes heavenward at this. He had not yet grasped the secret of Turkish time ending and beginning at sunset.

“*Hussein Fehmi Pasha* is begin very poor; he was a *khanji*’s boy—you do not know what that is?—a *khanji* is man who keep a *khan*—how you say, a little inn.

“But he is too brave for to make the beds and cook the coffee, he becomes soldier and is rise, till the padishah himself can see his fez above the other fezzes. And the padishah call him to the *Yildiz Kiosk* and make him decorated and titles him pasha. Then he make him vila of the *Aidin vilayet*.

“It is then that the padishah present me to *Fehmi Pasha*. We live at

Smyrna—you did heard of Smyrna—yes—and have a splendid white summer palace at Kogar Yali. But Fehmi Pasha has a quarrel with the spy whom the padishah send to watch him. The spy is tell terrible lies, and my poor husban' is exile to this cruel Uskub. And here I live."

"So that is what you meant when you said you were a gift wife?"

She shook her head, which in Turkey means yes, but she saved him further bewilderment by saying:

"Yes, I am gift wife."

"But what did you mean by calling yourself a yes-and-no wife?"

"Already the pasha did have a wife whom he loves terrible much. Nahir Hanum is his *bash kadin*. She is enoof for heem. There are in Turkey not many men now who find one wife not enough—perhaps also in your country."

Jebb looked wise.

"Fehmi Pasha loves his only wife. He wants no other. She did bear him many sons and some daughters; why should he have other wives?"

"But when the padishah present him me, he is afraid to refuse. He thank the padishah one thousand times, he makes me free woman, and he marries me, but he does not lift my veil."

Jebb could not believe his ears. It was so far from his notions of Turkey and her unspeakables, that a Turk should be true to one woman—and that this fascinating creature should go begging like a Christmas present which nobody wants and which is given away again and again.

"He didn't lift your veil? Lord, I wish I dared."

"Mashallah!" she cried in repugnance, and edged farther away.

"Forgive me!" said Jebb. "You have been so good to me. I—it doesn't mean so much in our country as in yours. The pasha did not lift your veil! That is how you are a yes-and-no wife?"

"That is it," she said coldly; then her

despair overbore her resentment, and she stared again at the clouds strewn now in dull mauve shreds without design, color, or meaning upon a sky that grew hot and hard as a brazier. She spoke rather to her Allah than to her guest.

"Fehmi Pasha is generous. He gives me this house, this beautiful garden, many slaves, enough money. But he gives me no child.

"I am useless upon the earth. I am a vase that shall never hold flowers or fruit. To have no love is bitter; but to have no child is—— But let me not complain. Allah knows what Allah wishes. I am of Islam, and Islam means 'I submit.'"

And she bent her forehead to the floor, murmuring the *Tasbih-i-Sijdah* thrice.

Jebb, leaning on his elbow, stared down at her in pity with a thrill of anger in it, of anger against the religion that should cause such sacrifice and instill such meekness, and of directer anger against the man who kept this hungry soul hungry.

CHAPTER VI.

THE MESSENGER FROM HEAVEN.

WHAT sort of fiend is that husband of yours to shut a human being in a cage? It's like keeping a bird in the dark."

"Seems it so wrong to the effendi?" she asked, creeping a little closer. "Sometimes to me also it seems cruel. In nights, when bitterness is black, when my heart cries aloud for a child, and my bosom aches for its child's head to be there asleep, I become very wecked.

"I say that Allah is not good, that Fehmi Pasha is evil man. Those times, fearful thoughts come to me to run away. But I doan' know where *to* go. Last night I standed by my window and prayed Allah to send his lightnings

upon me and upon this breast that shall never feel cheek of its child against it.

"My little child is more lost than yours, effendi. But it was while I was pleading for a thunder to come upon me—that I did seed you."

Jebb listened to the lonely voice issuing from the cerements of a ghost. He said, on a whimsey:

"Perhaps your Allah sent me to your rescue."

She took his sardonic humor in fierce earnest. From her quick breath and her immobile poise he guessed that her eyes had widened and that she stared at him with the awe of her superstition-steeped race.

"Kismet! Kismet!" she whispered. "Djebb Effendi knows not whence he comed or how he arrived. But here he is. He was sended. Of that it is not to be doubted. I know it is to test me. You are weak because your soul was bringed here in such haste that it is bruised like one who is waked suddenly from sleep.

"It is strange that Allah should choose a Giaour, an unbeliever, for my rescue. But Allah is great, there is no other but Allah, and while my soul is in my mouth I shall protect his messenger here till Allah shows you the way. Yes, even though my husband seek my life and yours."

Jebb was dismally amused at the idea that he was a heaven-sent messenger, but he said:

"Why should your husband care whom you receive, since he does not visit you?"

"Ah, the honor of his name, the sacredness of his harem." Jebb realized that this type of man was not unknown outside Turkey, this man who would keep his wife immured, though his fancy clung to another. But Miruma was running on proudly:

"It not needs his spies or his eunuchs to guard my honor. I am me, and I hold my own honor so precious

as Fehmi Pasha cannot hold his own preciouser."

She said it with so resolute a simplicity that Jebb was persuaded to believe what he might well have surmised, that good women occur in all countries and in all creeds. This one went on with complete earnestness:

"Djebb Effendi will do nothing, will not weesh to do nothing against my honor, I am sure of that.

"But the slaves, and the eunuchs, who know so much evil, hear so much scandal wheespered from the public baths, they could not believe it that you could be in my house and no wrong of it."

Jebb gazed with a new feeling at the baffling veiled statue. It was commanding respect as well as curiosity and gratitude. Being an American, and hearing of an unhappy household, he naturally asked:

"Do they ever have divorces in Turkey?"

"Divorce? Ah, the *talag*? Oh, much divorces. Once I meeted a *hanum* who is divorced eight mens."

"A divorce isn't hard to get, then?"

"No, easy—ver' easy."

"Then, why don't you divorce Mr. Pasha?"

"Ah, but, effendi, he gives me no cause for the *talag*; he is not cruel, as our customs go. He has not deserted me as our customs are. He does not beat me—he never even sees me. He is not refusing to geeve me a home and servants as are deegnified for me."

"Is there no other way?"

"I could leave him for no cause, but, then, I must forfeit my *nekyah*—how to say? The beeg money that is given with a bride—my *dot*, the French say? If I geeve up that, how shall I not starve—having not of family or friends?"

"Can't you get the pasha to make some arrangement?"

"I deed humbly pray him that, but

he fears the padishah. To put away the gift wife of the padishah! Ah, that takes a brave man!

"And now Fehmi Pasha he is in disgrace, and he hopes to ween back the good grace of the padishah. Besides, I theenk, though he does not say eet, the pasha would not like to pay back my *nekyah*. He is not so reech as once. He has no office."

Jebb winced at the situation. He was a surgeon by profession, and by habit of thought. He did not incline to slight palliative measures for troubles of body or mind. For him the knife.

Being a physician, he also had a greater reverence for the functions of nature than for almost anything else. To see a woman who longed to be a mother, and ought to be a mother, denied the privilege of her noble function, was as hard for him to endure as to see an arm, an eye, or a heart withering for lack of use, or on account of some removable obstruction.

And then, being human and a bachelor, and not used to the gentle ministrations of a mysteriously tender nurse, perhaps he felt most strongly of all the personal claims of the woman who had rescued him at the outrage of her scruples and at the risk of her life.

"It's cruel!" he cried. "It's heartless! It can't go on. If necessary, I'll do something myself."

"But what is there to be dood?" said Miruma, helpless with the syntax of her nation's laws as with the grammar of his.

Jebb smiled in spite of himself at her solecism, but smiled more bitterly at his own bravado. Here he was sick, disgraced, penniless, languageless.

And he would brave the whole power of the Koran's thousand years. He would be a genie himself, set this woman on a carpet, and fly with her—where and to what?

And then he thought how helpless he

was to save himself, and save that child intrusted to him. His problem was too various and too heavy to endure. He was so far from being a heaven-sent messenger that he was in need of a whole covey of angels to save himself.

Suddenly there was the sound as of a little child wailing. Jebb's heart lurched. Had his lost been found? The door burst open and Djaffer rushed into the room. It was Djaffer who was crying hysterically, with words which even his mistress could not understand.

CHAPTER VII.

THE MIRACLE MONGER.

THE aged infant, forgetting all etiquette in his dismay, poured out a raucous cacophony, but the universal language of pain was easily understood by an ear that had heard so much of it.

Jebb realized that Djaffer's incursion was due to no other alarm than distress. Jebb's own distress came first.

"Ask him about the child—did he find the child?"

He heard Miruma speak to the old eunuch, but she could get answers only voluble, not intelligible. The question repeated in growing emphasis had always the same answer—wails.

At last Jebb noticed that Djaffer was holding his right wrist with his left hand. His right hand was dangling like a stuffed black glove.

"He's had an accident," said Jebb, and rose at once to go to him, but his knees cautioned him to remain. "Bring him here."

It was the voice of authority. The stowaway had taken command of the ship. Miruma led the yowling giant forward, every step plainly a torment. He recoiled when Jebb put out his hand.

"Tell him not to be a cry baby! I won't hurt him," in his crispest operating-room tone.

He took the long black arm in his, and put away the clasping fingers. He

nodded his head and spoke in a language she could not understand:

"This silver-fork deformity shows that it is Colle's fracture. The lower end of the radius is broken. That's all. Ask him if he didn't slip and fall."

The question repeated in Turkish brought a flood of confirmation.

"Ees eet awfully seerious?" came from the trembling veil.

"No; it's nothing much. It hurts a trifle," Jebb admitted with the relative standard of pain that surgeons acquire. "Tell the black idiot not to pull away from me. I'll help him; I'm a surgeon."

It took all the mistress' authority, combined with all her physical push and Jebb's pull, to keep the eunuch from bolting. The pain was really ferocious; the side of his wrist was sprung into an eloquent curve.

His white eyeballs popped and his white teeth grimaced in agony as he watched Jebb's fingers creep forward. But there was something about Jebb's hands that impressed even the veriest layman with a sense of almost æsthetic delight; they had that ultimate grace of knowledge, of expertness, of directness.

His fingers went out on the discolored black flesh like ten white carpenters. They pressed here, pulled there, twisted, urged, persuaded, as the victim writhed and blubbered.

Suddenly there was a snap, and the pain was gone with such suddenness that it left ecstasy. Djaffer almost fainted with joy. He was for embracing Jebb's feet and kissing them, but Jebb was curt.

"Tell him not to be a fool, and to stand still."

The message interpreted brought rigidity, but could not suppress the adoration of the eyes. Henceforth, whoever might pay Djaffer his wages nominally, really he was Jebb's slave.

"Now, if I could have some light

wood—a cigar box or something—to make a splint."

Miurma cast her eyes about the room.

"Would thees *sofra* do?" she said, pointing to an inlaid taboret.

"Yes, but it's too handsome," said Jebb.

She made no answer but to pick up the low table and smash it on the floor, bringing two of the slender legs to Jebb. He stared at her with yet another emotion. Plainly a woman of decision and initiative.

"And now if I could have some muslin—or a long strip of cloth."

Swish! She had ripped off yards of her robe.

To Jebb's disappointment there was still enough left to conceal those mystic features.

He broke the boards of the taboret across his knee to the proper length, and laid them along the wrist as suited his purpose.

"And now," he said, "would *hanum* effendi please hold these boards, so—here and here—while I bind it together?"

Two hands came out of the cloud and rested right under his eyes. They were like little doves on the dark wood—only that they were not at all like little doves. They were like nothing on earth but each other.

Their finger nails were stained with henna. Jebb did not like that, but if beauty would compel it must be mitigated, humanized by some flaw. This was all the fault Jebb could find with the hands of Miruma.

In binding the splints together it was necessary for Jebb to touch those hands—they seemed to singe him like white fire. Once or twice he must pick them up and set them in another place upon the splints. He did it with leisure—not all of a surgeon's tasks must be performed with haste.

Djaffer, watching only the little pack-

ing case that was building upon his arm, saw nothing else. Jebb could not tell where the eyes behind the veil were watching. He hoped that they did not see him close his own eyes with a swooning thrill as his hands clasped hers. He was still very weak.

Jebb finished the task alone, and, as he knotted the bandages, he set his teeth hard and called himself names, for taking thought of a pair of hands belonging to an unseen woman, the wife of a stranger in an unheard-of region. Of the remaining muslin he made a sling, and slipped it over the bald black head.

"Tell him to wear the sling for a week and the splints for two weeks," he said as he finished, regaining a professional acerbity of tone. "Ask him again if he found out anything about the child."

The question was repeated. Jebb watched Djaffer nod his head. His heart leaped up, but the first word of the translation showed that he had again misunderstood the Turkish code.

Miruma spoke with wonderful gentleness:

"No, poor Djebb Effendi, he finded not the child. He is search the all of Uskub, avrywhere—the railroad station, the consuls Breetish, Roosian, the Turkish vila, the Christian also—for there is a Christian goovenor in Uskub appointed by the padishah. He is ask the gendarmes, and in the market place the drivers of buffalo carts, the soldiers. Everybody say: Nobody is see a leetle girl of the Franks."

"The Franks? No, no, she is an American child."

"All you Eenglish and Americans and Europeans are Franks to us."

The slave girl appeared and beckoned to Djaffer with mystery, and he bowed himself out as well as he could in his anxiety to show the girl what a great man he was with his wonderful arm. Miruma went on:

"He telled me he is very complete in his searching. At the railroad station he is finded a man which remembers you. Djaffer makes the description of the child. The man is say: 'Yesterday a Frank man comes off the train from the south.' And he is telled how you look perfectly, but no child walked with you."

"Then I came from the south. But where? Where?"

"The south is a beeg place. You do not remember nothing?"

"I remember nothing."

Briefly he poured out to her his story, only he did not tell her the cause of the great hiatus in his life. He simply said that he became ill. He had not the bravery to confess the truth.

She, remembering his repugnance to the very hint of liquor, and remembering some of the wonder stories told her by superstitious slaves and fellow slaves, made no difficulty of it.

The theory that he was bewitched was a simple, a direct explanation, especially as it was linked with a hope amounting to a belief that Allah had lifted him from the earth and brought him from afar to rescue her in some unseen way. Allah would make it clear in Allah's own good time.

It confused Miruma that the messenger was more agitated about the child he had lost than about the woman he had been sent to find. But this also was in Allah's bosom.

Her faith was elastic enough to stretch round even the incongruity that her rescuer had no money. Jebb confessed this with pride fairly burrowing in the dust. It was the crowning ignominy of his plight that he must stoop to beggary or to starvation.

He postponed the admission of his penury to the last moment and then postponed it again. It was worse than ashes in his mouth. It was pure quinine.

And the answer to his nauseating

apology was that she had known it all the time. Djaffer, finding him unconscious in the street, had, at her orders, undressed him, bathed him, put him to bed, and taken his clothes, drenched as they were with rain, to dry them in the kitchen and to iron them while the other servants slept.

Djaffer had reported that there was not a thing in all the stranger's garments—only the usual pocket dust, not a portemonnaie, not a card, not a coin, not even a bronze baish-para.

Neither Djaffer's report of his investigations, nor Jebb's confession of insolvency, had any influence on Miruma, for the laws that founded Arabian hospitality founded Turkish also. As delicately as might be, she strove to put Jebb at his ease.

"It shall be pleasure to me to geeve to Djebb Effendi what I have of money." Seeing his look of horror, she hastened to amend: "And he shall pay it again when Allah sends him reeches once more."

But Jebb put up his hand to check her. He could endure no more.

He was saved from making an exhibition of himself by the entrance of Djaffer to inform Miruma that the carriage of Nimat Hanum had called for her.

Some days before, never dreaming that the storm would send ashore at her feet this bit of human jetsam, Miruma had gladly accepted an invitation to join Nimat Hanum and some of her friends in a long drive.

Uskub has no "Sweet Waters of Europe" or "Isles of the Princes," where its women may revel with uplifted veils. Yet the miserablest region offers the Mohammedan some place to take his *kief*—which has never been better defined than, all unwittingly, by Walt Whitman: "To loaf and invite the soul."

Uskub has a winding river, the Vardar, with heights above it, and it has

its share of skyscape and cloud parade where the prisoners of the veil and the lattice can uncage their fettered eyes.

Before Jebb had come, the merest excursion across the ancient stone bridge, up the steep, past the citadel, and out into the widespread cemeteries—and on up and down steep hills and past Albanian shepherds with fat-tailed flocks—on toward Kalkandele, and back before the sunset call to prayer—that was a glimpse of Nirvana to the gift wife.

To-day, however, it meant exile from a greater privilege than any communion with impersonal nature.

Never in her life had Miruma talked with a man who treated her as Jebb treated her. She had read novels galore of France, England, Germany, and one or two from America; she saw that Frankish men and women quarreled, hated, and broke each other's hearts and lives, but always there was a parity in their relations that lifted the women worlds above the ideal dolls of Turkish custom.

One may grieve and ache upon a mountaintop, but how much nobler it seemed than to grieve and ache in a barred dungeon underground.

Jebb was the first Frankish man Miruma had ever talked with. Miruma knew that Jebb was restless to be gone upon his quest. She would be in danger till he was gone. Yet every moment of his presence was a day in a foreign bazaar to a desert outlaw.

She hated to leave him for a mere afternoon of silly gossip with women of equally narrow life. Yet she feared not to go.

Any excuse might set suspicion afoot. If she sent down word that she was ill, Nimat Hanum would rush in to see her. Probably the whole flock of picnicking *hanums* would flutter up the stairs, cackling and curious.

With a sigh of resignation she told

Djaffer to say that she would come down as soon as she could slip into her *charchaf*.

She made the humblest excuses to Jebb, and told him that her absence would be to his advantage as he needed sleep.

To her, trained by the appalling indolence of harem life, sleep was a thing to be found by seeking. She advised him to slumber, as though that were all that was needed, and, promising to return in time for dinner, and cautioning him, for his own sake and hers, to keep well hidden, she left him with many a deep salaam.

She took with her more of his interest than he could have imagined of a woman met but once, and not yet seen. Her going was like taking the light from the room.

He started suddenly, and, running to the door, called softly to her. She had already thrown back her veil, but she pulled it down again before she turned.

"Before you go," Jebb pleaded with an anxiety that puzzled her in so commonplace a query, "before you go, please tell me what day of the month this is?"

"Thees ees—let me see?" She pondered—what woman ever knew an impersonal date? "Oh, yes, to-day ees the twenty-onest day of Zilhije."

"Of what?" gasped Jebb.

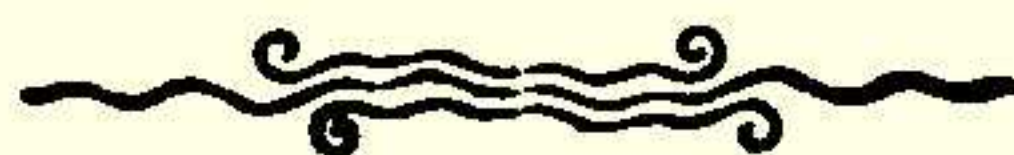
"Zilhije," she repeated.

"What month is that in English?"

"I am sorree. I do not know. *Au revoir*, Djebb Effendi, *à bientôt!*"

He turned back dismally. He had but the faintest idea of where he was; he had no idea at all of when he was.

TO BE CONTINUED.



LET THEM TIP TABLES

By Harry Kemp

THE lightning, burning half the sky,
Can trickle through a wire;
And he who speaks the truth to-day
To-morrow proves a liar.

Let them tip tables, if they will,
Or levitate a chair
Or listen for a little voice
That walks the unseen air;

But I, I need no other thing
Than what I have to-day,
This hope that all the world has held,
Will hold till Time grows gray,

The winging instinct in the heart,
The high, unbroken trust
That there is light beyond the dark
And life beyond the dust!

The Case of the Man Blind

T. E. Transeau



THE Farnhurst murderers had been caught at last. Baffled for months by a series of ghastly murders, the police had at last caught the assassins red-handed, and succeeded in capturing two of them. A third had escaped, and left no clew that might serve to trace him.

A motive for the crimes was lacking. Altogether there had been three separate and distinct tragedies, in one of which two persons had been killed. In two of the cases there had been an accompanying robbery, but Chief Hamilton, of the Farnhurst force, believed these to be only a blind. The valuables and money taken had been trivial in amount.

The man known as Blind was marked by a misshapen thumb. It had probably been caught in a machine at some time, and was very badly mangled. He and his companions had been lacking in caution, and in every case had left their finger prints behind, to be eagerly photographed and compared by the detectives.

Blind and his partner Snare preserved a sullen silence when questioned. They refused to engage a lawyer to defend them, or to plead themselves, at their trial. The judge was compelled to assign them an attorney. The man of law was hard put to it for a defense, for when he visited them in the jail the men refused to talk to him, or to give him any information about themselves whatever. Shrugging his shoulders, he left them. Later he informed the judge that his clients were doubtless insane. And this proved to be the sole defense at the trial.

The two defendants were about an age, possibly sixty or sixty-five years. Both appeared to be of a rough, ignorant type, possibly country people or mountaineers. The man Blind, in particular, behaved like an animal, and when eating tore his food like a wild beast. He was a great hairy powerful brute, while Snare was a wizened little fellow. When an alienist was sent to examine them, they snarled like wild beasts and refused to permit him to

touch them. Later he testified that he considered them sane, but possibly obsessed by some idea which caused them to behave in such fashion.

Curiously enough, the victims had been old men, except in one case. In the Disston murder, Mrs. Disston had been killed while attempting to defend her husband. All of the victims had been residents of Farnhurst for years. All of them were persons of property. All of them had been church members, and had led consistent, orderly lives, so far as known. Apparently no reason existed for such terrible animosity being harbored against them, as to culminate in these horrible murders. In each case the victim had been bludgeoned to death.

The evidence at the trial was damning. In the Orem affair, where Blind and Snare were captured, neighbors had heard terrible cries coming from the home of old Judge Orem. Summoning the police, they were just in time to intercept three men flying from the house. After a desperate fight, the two were captured, a third man getting away in the darkness. On being interrogated, the prisoners had given the names Blind and Snare. This and nothing more.

On entering the house, the judge had been found on the floor of his bedroom, his head beaten to a pulp. His daughter stood by the body, distractedly wringing her hands. She had heard his cries, and had responded at once, just in time to see the three men running down the front stairs. She had gone to her father's aid, but he was already past all human help.

Blind's thumb print was offered as evidence at the trial, likewise the finger prints of Snare and the unknown. They had been found on the scene of both the earlier crimes, here on a curtain, there on a chair, once on a wall. The prosecuting attorney determined to ask for separate trials for the two men, doubt-

less hoping to prove that both of them were guilty of murder. In the Orem case it was believed that Blind had killed the old judge, for reasons which we will see.

The judge had been struck with a short club, made of a piece of seasoned hickory. On the larger end was fastened a leaden ball, about the size of a small orange. A leather thong was wound through a hole in the handle, probably to be secured around the wrist. The bludgeon was just about long enough to be carried conveniently in a deep overcoat pocket. It had been picked up the day after the murder, on Judge Orem's grounds, where it had doubtless been cast away, in the headlong flight of the murderers.

The doctors had testified that it must have been wielded by a very powerful man, for the judge's skull had been crushed like an eggshell. Hence the belief that Blind had been the actual murderer, for Snare appeared to be feeble with years and infirmities.

A sensation was created at the trial by the collapse of the lawyer assigned to the defendants. He was taken suddenly ill, and his condition appearing serious, the judge had ordered a recess. At the conclusion of the recess, the lawyer not being able to appear, Judge Buffum was about to appoint another attorney to act for the accused men.

To the surprise of every one, however, before the judge had executed this intention, a well-dressed middle-aged man, seated in the courtroom, arose to his feet and, after asking permission, addressed the court. He stated that he was a lawyer, and asked the judge for permission to defend the accused.

On presenting proper credentials, proving that he was entitled to practice before the bar of this court, the judge was only too glad to appoint him to the thankless position. The pris-

oners hardly looked at him, displaying no interest whatever. His name was Newbold Nealon, and he was located in a near-by city in the same county.

As I stated before, the public prosecutor, anxious lest Snare might escape, wished to have the prisoners arraigned separately. Knowing he had but little evidence against Snare, he hoped to convict him of one of the other crimes, the Disston or Ring tragedies. But old Judge Buffum, who had been a colleague of Judge Orem, directed him to draw his charge against the pair.

The strange lawyer made a masterly and affecting plea for the defense, but in vain. He dwelt at length on the apparent ignorance and diseased minds of the accused, but all his oratory was in vain. The jury, without leaving the box, rendered a verdict of murder in the first degree. The judge then arose and sentenced them to be electrocuted one month later.

Not a word said either of them, but when Judge Buffum, his tall form towering like that of an avenging angel, put the usual question as to whether they had anything to say before being sentenced, Snare seemed about to speak, but at a ferocious glance from Blind, evidently changed his mind. The judge, seeing the byplay, and hoping that some ray of light might be cast on the reason for the series of crimes, repeated his question. But neither made any reply, and at length the judge pronounced sentence.

A month elapsed, and the men had been sent to the State prison at Urbana, where the sentence was to be carried out. They were placed in the cells assigned to the condemned. No one visited them, except on one occasion the lawyer, Newbold Nealon.

The sentence was duly executed, in the presence of the prison officials, the usual witnesses and the accredited newspaper men. They were placed in the electric chair but a scant half hour

apart, Blind being executed last, at his own request. Both went to their death in a firm manner, refusing either to affirm or deny their guilt. Strange to say, both claimed the comforts of religion in their last moments, and a Methodist clergyman gave them the last rites of his church. To his gentle inquiries, however, as to the crimes of which they had been convicted, they made no reply. They stated that they had called him because they had lived like Christians, and meant to die in the same manner. After the execution, an undertaker removed the bodies and later buried them in a cemetery at Urbana.

This ended the case, as far as the police were concerned. Not a trace had been found of the third man, nor was anything known of him. It was later discovered that the men had been living for some time in a hut in the woods near the railroad, but so far as known no one had ever spoken to them, nor did any one know whence they came.

One day, a month or two afterward, a man came rushing into Chief Hamilton's office. In his hand he bore a piece of paper, which he was excitedly waving. He was white as a sheet, and his features were so distorted by fear that the chief at first had some difficulty in recognizing him.

He was a man by the name of Threapleton, who lived in a beautiful colonial mansion at Cedar Grove, a suburb of Farnhurst. He was a retired banker, and had become acquainted with Hamilton through some fraternal connections. He was about sixty-five years of age, but looked at least twenty years older, as he at last managed to inform Hamilton of the object of his visit.

"Chief, I received this in the mail this morning. What it means I do not know. But my wife and family are very much alarmed, and I demand that you give me adequate police protection

against this madman. Here is the letter, read for yourself." As he spoke, his voice wavered. It was that of a man whose nerves are ready to snap. He appeared to be in the last extremity of terror.

With trembling hand he laid a sheet of dirty blue-lined note paper before the chief. The handwriting was clear and scholarly, and the ink the color of blood.

The message was indeed startling.

"The end is not yet. The Seven Brothers still lack two of their number. Watch closely, Threapleton, or there will be a strange face in hell in a few days' time. Never forget. I have sworn that I will not rest in my grave till you, too, have started on your long journey. Watch! Watch!! Watch!!!"

The chief looked up at the white face peering into his own, and said, reassuringly, "Probably some crank playing a joke on you. We have dozens of cases like this. I will investigate, but in the meantime I would advise you to go home and forget all about it, Mr. Threapleton."

The man gave a queer moan. "O my God! Don't you see it? Look at it! Look at the mark!"

Hamilton followed his pointing finger, and for the first time became aware of a dirty smudge on the paper which seemed to be by way of signature. To his horror and amazement, he recognized it as a reproduction of the horrible thumb print of Blind, whose body had been interred in a pauper's grave at Urbana!

After he had recovered from his first feeling of amazement and horror, Hamilton told Mr. Threapleton to be seated, and proceeded to question him closely. He suspected that he knew more of the author of this strange missive than he had yet told. However, all Hamilton's questioning failed to budge him from his original statement that he knew nothing either of the Farnhurst mur-

ders or of the perpetrators. He reiterated his original statement that he considered the writer of the note a maniac.

Hamilton examined the envelope in which the letter had been sent. It was of coarse brown paper, and had been posted at Fernhurst central post office at noon the day preceding. The writing and ink used were identical with those of the note.

Hamilton kept the strange missive and dismissed the frightened Threapleton. He promised to send a couple of plain-clothes men out to Cedar Grove, for a time at least. He was half convinced that Mr. Threapleton spoke the truth, yet there was that lurking gleam in his eye as he told his tale that made the chief fear he was concealing something.

Several days passed. Then one morning Threapleton came in again. He had received another letter. If possible, he seemed more frightened than before. In silence he handed the missive to Hamilton. It read as follows:

"Threapleton, your time has come. In forty-eight hours you will be dead. Make up your mind to rid your soul of its weight of crime before you go. The Seven Brothers will soon be together in hell. Repent, sinner, repent!"

The chief was at a loss what to think of this new warning. Secretly more interested in the old man's tale than he had allowed him to perceive, he had ordered the town fine-tooth-combed after the receipt of the first missive. No end of rough-looking strangers had been picked up about town, only to be released on establishing their identity.

The envelope was postmarked as before. It had been mailed at the same station the preceding evening. The envelope and paper were identical in quality with those of the earlier missive; being, in fact, of a kind that might have been purchased at any sta-

tionery store. As before there appeared a faint smudge on the paper, which on examination again proved to be the disgusting likeness of Blind's maimed thumb.

The chief tried to allay the fears of Threapleton, and promised him to send some more men to guard his place, meanwhile advising him to stay indoors as much as possible. The old man, obviously shaken to the depths of his superstitious soul, sorrowfully shook his head, and went away.

Hamilton immediately got in touch with the men guarding the estate at Cedar Grove. He ordered them to redouble their precautions, and told them that he was sending two more men out to help them. Having accomplished this, he knew not what else to do. The strange thumb mark he was at a loss to account for. For the first time in his long career a feeling of horror and disgust that was almost akin to fear passed over him, and he involuntarily shuddered.

The day passed and Hamilton went home. It was his weekly night off, the evening which he usually gave entirely to himself and his family. On these occasions he left word at his office that he was not to be disturbed unless some affair of grave importance took place.

After dinner, his wife and children departed for the theater. He had begged to be excused, pleading a desire to finish a book in which he was much interested. He sat alone in his den, smoking and reading. By chance, that night of all nights, he was reading a volume of Edgar Allan Poe.

The diabolical thumb print kept recurring to his mind. Slowly and as he read, a horrible suspicion began to form in his brain. Even to himself, he hesitated to picture the horrible idea that had occurred to him. For a man in his position his nerves were none of the best.

The telephone bell rang. Startled

at the sound, he hastened to the instrument. It was his son telling him that their car had broken down, and that he, with his mother and sister, would be a trifle late in getting home. With a sigh of relief Hamilton hung up the receiver.

It was almost half past eleven. He was beginning to feel sleepy. He was just on the point of retiring, when some one rapped loudly below.

The servants had long since retired. Hamilton descended and went to the front door. Cautiously opening it, he saw no one. He stepped outside and looked about, but not a trace of his visitor was to be found. Returning, badly puzzled, he spied a letter on the vestibule floor. It lay just inside the sill. It had doubtless been inserted beneath the door and the bell rung to attract his attention. In his haste he had not noticed it on coming out.

His blood froze in his veins as he recognized the cheap brown envelope and blood-red ink of the message to Threapleton. Fearing he knew not what, he tore it open.

Within were three closely written pages of the same blue-lined note paper as before. They read as follows:

"Sir: As you read this James Threapleton lies dead on the floor of his own bedroom. You may as well read to the end, for he is past all human help. You may be sure that I know whereof I speak, for I made very certain, before going away to await my own end."

Hamilton had made a movement, as if to go at once, as he read the opening lines, but he could not tear himself away from the terrible fascination of the letter. Pausing solely to ring up his chauffeur and order him to get out his police runabout, he continued to read the letter.

"I feel that I owe you an explanation of some events that have no doubt been puzzling you. My mission

is accomplished at last, so I feel safe in telling you everything.

"Forty years ago, three young men left New York, to go West and seek their fortunes. Their names were John Orem, Samuel Disston and Robert Ring.

"They finally drifted to California, which was still the Mecca of the seekers after gold, although most of the deposits had played out years before. Still many thousands of people were prospecting, and occasionally some one would make a strike, although of course such happenings were much rarer than in the early days.

"Time passed, and winter, the winter of the Sierras, came on. Unused to the climate, and, like many others, believing California to be exclusively a land of roses, the first snowfall caught them unprepared.

"In thin clothes, exhausted, and without food, they lost their way in the dense woods of the mountains. In a short time they would have perished, but fortunately they struck the little camp of some miners like themselves, four young fellows, James Threapleton, Edward Blind, Jacob Snare, and myself.

"We were in good spirits. We had just struck a pocket of gold that promised to make us all millionaires. So rich was this deposit, that in pity for the young wanderers so far from home, and being in need of help to wash and pan the precious grains from the icy waters of the mountain stream before winter set in earnest, we agreed, in the generosity of our hearts, to let them share our find equally. In high glee we nicknamed ourselves the Seven Brothers, and many were the pranks we played, as we fought the frozen stream for the wealth it bore.

"The Easterners were overjoyed at this arrangement, and they being all men of pleasing and amiable dispositions, for a time we had no reason to regret our generous act.

"One day, however, Orem came to the original four of us, and told us that he and his friends had decided that they had taken enough gold to satisfy them, and wanted us to stop work for the winter, repair to some city, and enjoy ourselves during the cold months. We could return, he said, in the spring.

"I quivered with anger at this display of ingratitude. Here were the newcomers, trying to run the camp, after we had saved their lives and shared our fortune with them. To my surprise, Threapleton sided with them at first, but quickly changed his tune when he realized the depth of the opposition of Snare, Blind, and myself. The others pretended to be satisfied, but I could see that they longed to be off to scatter the hard-won gold that we had shared with them. For a time they whispered together, and I imagined they were plotting mischief.

"To make a long story short, Snare, Blind, and myself awoke one morning to find a strangely quiet cabin. We were alone. The others had fled in the night. Frantically we sprang to the crude wooden chest where we kept our gold. The chest was unlocked, and only a few almost worthless grains of dust remained to mock us. The Easterners, with Threapleton as guide, had stolen our gold and departed.

"We pursued them in hot haste, following their trail through the snow, but they had hours start of us. Finally the trail was lost in a road which was much traveled. To again abridge my narrative, let it suffice to say that up to a short six months ago, I never laid my eyes on any of the four again.

"Snare and Blind were heartbroken. For months they hung around gambling dens and other such places in Frisco, Carson, and other cities where they thought the robbers might be spending their ill-gotten wealth. Finally they drifted back to prospecting, after first cleaning up the few thou-

sand dollars that remained in our strike. Never again did they have the luck to make more than the barest living.

"As for myself, I came East. After a time I took up law, which I have successfully practiced this last thirty years. Always I have had one eye open for the rascals who robbed my comrades and myself.

"One day last fall I passed Judge Orem on the streets of New York City. You may wonder how I recognized him after forty years, but the desire for revenge sharpens a man's memory and vision. I trailed him to his home. To my surprise I found he lived in Farnhurst, a bare twenty miles from the town where I had located. A few cautious inquiries served to inform me that the rest of the band had also settled here, secure in the knowledge that for forty years their path had not been crossed by their victims, and perhaps drawn together by that very crime. They had not even bothered to change the names by which they were known to us.

"After several months' effort I succeeded in locating Blind and Snare. I informed them of my discovery, that while they were roaming the earth, homeless and friendless, the despoilers of their youth and happiness were living quietly here in the East, rich, respected, and powerful.

"The rest you know or can imagine. Realizing from the first that there was but one outcome to the situation, I nevertheless stood by them to the last, at some risk to myself, I think, during the trial. We had first warned all four of the men, but secure in their fancied power, they refused to make any restitution whatever.

"As to Threapleton, you will find

him lying dead, a victim to his own fear and cowardice. You can imagine the horrors of his death when you observe the manner of it. Likewise you will understand some things which are even now not clear to you. Knowing his cowardly nature, so sure was I of the outcome of this affair, that I assure you the major portion of this narrative was written several days ago.

"For myself, pursuit, I believe, is useless. In any event, I have a heart affection which the doctors tell me will carry me off in a month—or perhaps three or four. Thus will pass the last of the Seven Brothers, that name of hollow mockery.

"Thus I end the tale of one more proof of the treachery of man to man, where gold is concerned.

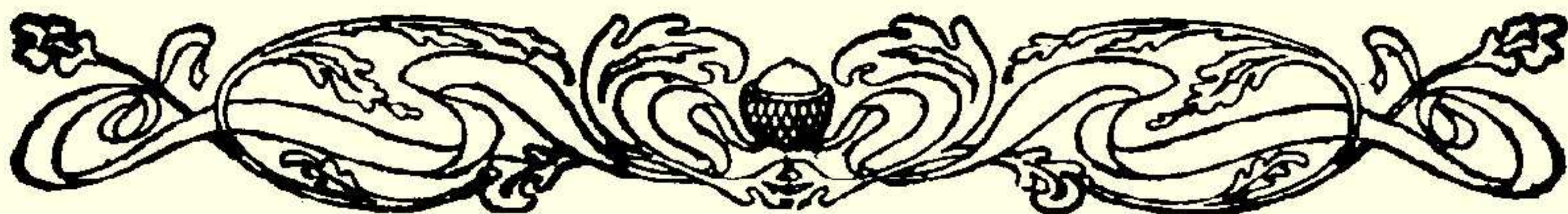
"(Signed) NEWBOLD NEALON."

Hamilton heard his runabout outside as he finished reading. In fifteen minutes he was knocking at the mansion of James Threapleton.

The family had retired. After some moments he was admitted by a frightened butler and conducted to the old man's room. The door was unlocked, and Hamilton stepped inside, not even pausing to knock.

There, stretched stark on the floor, lay James Threapleton, his hands thrown out and face averted as from some horrid sight that had overcome him. Turning, Hamilton found his worst suspicions confirmed.

For on the bed, the severed end concealed beneath the pillow, lay the arm of the man Blind, with the hideous thumb exposed in all its ugliness, and the hand seeming to beckon the dead man to hasten to join the Seven Brothers.



A MAELADE OF THE SEA

By Roy Le Moyne



OUT from the darkness of the wood
She came a glittering shaft of light
Who carried at her breast a rood
Deep woven in the garment's white.

She was a maiden fair to see
With hair in plaited golden strands,
And eyes of radiant mystery,
And slender, folded, patient hands.

In slow step and with voiceless prayer
She paced the fringes of the sea
Now melting in the misted air,
Or waiting, listening quietly.

Then loosened she the braided gold
That fell like sunshine through her hands;
Beseeemed she then to pause and hold
Strange worship on the naked sands.

She stopped her pacing to and fro,
Stooping where the ocean swept
And like a lily bending low
She bowed her lovely head and wept.

"I've come in answer to thy voice,
Oh, mighty thunder of the sea;
I've waited long in seeking choice
Of whether I should come to thee.

**"Here in the solitude of night
My heart has found its needed rest
Where I shall end a weary flight
Within the darkness of thy breast."**

**The dull boom of the surf died down,
The wind grew tongueless in the trees,
She loosed the clasp that held her gown
And let it drop about her knees.**

**With hands held forward to the sea
And murmuring lips, she took her flight. . . .
From out the sky a storm broke free
And shattered noisily the night.**

**When with the morning sun the Night
Drew up her darkened skirts and fled
The townfolk viewed the tempest's might,
The scattered wreckage and the dead.**

**Out from the wood, down to the sea,
With shaking, outspread, pleading hands,
A youth in wide-eyed misery
Stopped where she rested on the sands.**

**"Here with the shattered hulks of ships
Lies one who knew the sea's duress;
Think, three weeks gone I pressed these lips
And gazed upon her loveliness.**

**"There once thrilled in these open eyes
Now darkened by the death of light,
A glow more radiant than the skies
When day stands face to face with night.**

**"Is this not wondrous lovely hair
That runs like sunshine through my hands?
Why stand you piteous beggars there
In stinging silence on the sands?"**

**He raised his arms above his head
Loud cursing all life's misery,
And with a shriek he plunged ahead
Into the darkness of the sea.**





The Heads of Cerberus

Francis
Stevens

SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS.

Robert Drayton Viola and Terence Trenmore, after having touched the magic dust in the ancient vial known as "The Heads of Cerberus," vanish into an unknown medieval country called Ulthia. There they undergo many startling and uncanny adventures among a strange though friendly race of the sixteenth century. The three drift together beyond the borderland of Ulthia, and find themselves in a city which they recognize as Philadelphia. But extraordinary changes have taken place there. A new régime has set in, such a government as Drayton and Trenmore have never heard of before. The three are arrested because of their unlikeness to the natives. Drayton and Trenmore are sentenced by two of the powers, calling themselves Mr. Virtue and Mr. Mercy, to be dropped into the Pit of the Past. In the pit lurks the monster, the God of War, who devours all rebels against peace, rebels such as the natives believe Trenmore, Drayton, and Viola to be. Mr. Virtue, attracted by Viola's beauty, wishes to save her for himself after having done away with her two protectors. A woman calling herself Lovely comes upon the scene, and, impressed by Trenmore's huge strength, prevails upon his captors to spare his life so that he may participate in an athletic contest the natives are soon to hold. Her lover, a man calling himself Cleverest, objects, but she overrules him, and the three captives are to be given a fighting chance for their lives, a chance depending wholly upon Trenmore's being able to vanquish in combat the strongest of the rival athletes who are to be pitted against him.

CHAPTER X.

THE FOURTH VICTIM.

THE three quondam prisoners, seated about a table where they had done full justice to an excellent repast, were alone. The scene about them was no longer of barbaric magnificence, but presented the more comfortable and familiar luxury of a good hotel. Lovely, or rather Loveliest, for such they had discovered the lady's full title to be, had done her work with surprising thoroughness and munificence. Having made herself responsible for their custody, she had ordered the two men freed, carried

them all in her own motor car to a large hotel on South Broad Street, and there engaged for them a suite consisting of bedrooms, private baths and a large parlor.

Her exact standing in this new Philadelphia, so like the old and so unlike, was as yet unknown to them. So far as their needs were concerned, she seemed to possess a power of command practically unlimited.

The hotel itself presented no apparent difference to any other large, metropolitan hostelry. Drayton, in fact, who had once before stopped at this identical hotel, could have sworn that even the furnishings were the same as

upon his former visit. The clerk at the desk was perhaps a trifle too obsequious for a normal hotel clerk. Otherwise, their introduction had been attended by no bizarre circumstance. Having seen them comfortably established, having begged them to send out for anything they might require and have the price charged to "Penn Service"—that mysterious, ubiquitous Service again!—their odd protectress had assured Trenmore that she would look in on them early next day and departed.

The lady had whirled them so rapidly through this period of change in their fortunes that they had been able to ask no questions, and though she had talked almost incessantly, the monologue had conveyed little meaning. They found themselves continually bewildered by references, simple in themselves, and yet cryptic for lack of a key to them.

The conclusion of their late dinner, served in their own rooms, at least found them more comfortable than at any time since that fatal hour when the Cerberus was uncapped. If they were still under police surveillance, there was no evidence to show it. By common consent, however, they had abjured for the present any idea of escape. Precarious though their position might be, such an attempt in their state of ignorance was predoomed to failure.

The meal finished, and the servant having departed for the last time, Drayton asked a question which had been in the back of his head for two hours past.

"Miss Viola, what were you saying about Ulithia when Mercy interrupted? Before the pit was opened, I mean, while we stood beneath the Red Bell?"

"I remember. It was merely a notion of mine, Mr. Drayton."

"But tell it," urged her brother.

"When we meddled with that strange

dust," the girl said softly, "I think we intruded upon that which was never meant for mortals. The White Weaver said it—she said we had no place in Ulithia. And she told us to go *forward*, go deeper, and that the door was open before us."

"Yes, she did," sighed Drayton.

"And so," continued the girl, "we escaped from William, but went *forward*. Just how far is what we have yet to discover."

"You mean," said the ex-lawyer slowly, "that some six hours ago by my watch—which has not been wound, by the way, yet is still running—we practically stepped out of space and time as we know them into a realm where those words have no meaning? And that when we passed through the moon gate, we returned into *space* at almost the place from which we started, but into *time* at a point perhaps many years later?"

"Yes. You say it better than I, but that is what I believe."

Drayton shook his head, smiling. "Something like that occurred to me, Miss Viola, but the more I think of it the more impossible it seems."

"And why, Bobby?" queried Trenmore impatiently. "Sure, 'tis the only moderately reasonable explanation of all the unreasonability we have met!"

"Because if enough years had passed to so completely change the laws, the customs, even the value of human life, why is it that Time has left costumes, language, even buildings, except for city hall, exactly as we have always known them? Why, this very hotel has not so much as changed the livery of its bell boys since I was here three years ago!"

"That is a difficulty," admitted Viola. Then she added quickly, "How very stupid I am! Terry, won't you ring for one of those same bell boys and ask him to bring us an evening paper?"

So obvious a source of information

and so easily obtainable! Drayton and Trenmore sprang as one man for the push button. Just as they reached it, however, there came a loud crash, as of something heavy and breakable falling upon a bare floor. The sound issued from the bedroom assigned to Trenmore. A moment later that gentleman had flung open the door. The chamber within was dark, save for what light entered it from the parlor. Peering uncertainly, Trenmore stood poised for a moment. Then he had hurled himself through the doorway. There was another crash, this time of an overturned chair.

Drayton, following, ran his hand along the wall inside the door. An instant later he had thrown on the electrics. The room sprang alight, disclosing the Irishman clasping a kicking man to his bosom with both mighty arms. Though the fellow fought desperately, he might as well have contended with an Alaskan bear. Trenmore simply squeezed the tighter. The breath left the captive's lungs in a despairing groan, and he was tossed, limp as a wrung rag, upon the bed.

By now Viola was in the room. "I hope you haven't hurt him, Terry," she cried. "The man might be a policeman in plain clothes!"

"If he is, he might better have watched us openly," growled Trenmore. "Here, you! Why were you after hiding in my bedroom? Was it eavesdropping you were?"

The figure on the bed sat up weakly.

"You can bet your sweet life I'd of been somewhere else, if I'd knowed you was around, bo! Why not tackle a guy your own size?"

Drayton burst out laughing, and after a moment Terence joined him.

The man on the bed could hardly have been over five feet in height, but what he lacked in length was made up in rotundity. His round face was smooth-shaven and wore an expression

of abused innocence which would have done credit to an injured cherub. Though disheveled, the captive's dark-green suit was of good material and irreproachable cut. Socks and tie matched it in color, as did the ribbon band on his panama, knocked off in the struggle. His one false color note was the glaring yellow of a large identification button, pinned duly beneath the left shoulder, and the too-brilliant tan of his broad-soled Oxfords.

"I say," repeated Trenmore, "what are you doing in my room? Or did you but come here to break the cut-glass carafe, and the noise of it betrayed you?"

"I came here——" The man on the bed hesitated, but only for a moment. "I came here," he announced with great dignity, "because I believed this to be my own room, sir. The numbers in this corridor are confusing! I shall speak to the management in the morning. If I have disturbed you, I'm sorry."

The little fellow had assumed a quaint dignity of manner and phraseology which for a moment took them all aback. Then Trenmore walked over to the outer door and tried it. The door was locked.

"And how's this?" demanded Terence, his blue eyes twinkling.

"I—er—locked it, sir, when I entered."

"Yes? And have you the key, then?"

The man made a pretense of searching his pockets; then smiled wryly and threw up his hands.

"Oh, what's the use? You got me, bo! I come in through the window."

"Just so. Well, Bobby, 'tis the same old world, after all. Take a glance through the lad's pockets, will you? Something of interest might be there."

Catching the man's wrists he twisted them back and held the two easily in one hand. This time Trenmore's victim knew better than to struggle. He

stood quiet while Drayton conducted the suggested search.

Viola wondered why the lawyer's face was suddenly so red. She had been told nothing of the episode at the house on Walnut Street; but Drayton had remembered, and the memory sickened him. The parallel to be drawn between this sneak thief and himself was not pleasant to contemplate.

His search was at first rewarded by nothing more interesting than a silk handkerchief, a plain gold watch, some loose change and a bunch of rather peculiar-looking keys. Then, while exploring the captive's right-hand coat pocket, Drayton came on a thing which could have shocked him no more had it been a coiled live rattlesnake.

"Why—why——" he stammered, extending it in a suddenly tremulous hand. "Look at this, Terry. *Look at what I found in his pocket!*"

"'Tis the Cerberus! The Cerberus vial itself!" The Irishman's voice was no more than awed whisper.

"Where 'did you get this?" Drayton uttered the demand so fiercely that the captive shrank back. "Where?" cried Drayton again, brandishing the vial as though intending to brain the man with it. "Where did you get it?"

"Don't hit me, bo! I ain't done nothing! I picked it up in the street."

Trenmore twisted him around and glared in a manner so fiendishly terrifying that the little man's ruddy face paled to a sickly greenish white.

"The truth, little rat! Where did you get it?"

"I—I—— Leggo my arm; you're twisting it off! I'll tell you."

Terence, who had not really meant to torture the little round man, released him but continued to glare.

"I got it over to a house on Walnut Street."

"You did? When?"

The man glanced from one to the other. His cherubic face assumed a

look of sudden, piteous doubt, like a child about to cry.

"Bo, as near as I can make things out, it was about two hundred years ago I done that! But I'd of took oath it was no later than this morning! Now send me to the bughouse if you want. I'm down and out!"

"Two—hundred—years!" This from Drayton. "Terry, I begin to see daylight in one direction, at least. My man, where did you acquire that yellow button you are wearing?"

The captive glanced down at his lapel. "I lifted it off a guy that had been hittin' up the booze. Everybody else in town was wearing one, and I got pinched for not; but I shook the cop and then I got in style." He grinned deprecatingly.

"I thought the button was obtained in some such manner. Terry, this fellow is the crook, or one of the crooks, who were hired by your unknown collector friend to steal the Cerberus! He is here by the same route as ourselves." He whirled upon the thief. "Did you or did you not pass through a kind of dream, or place, or condition called Ulithia?"

"Say," demanded the prisoner in turn, "is either of you fellows the guy that owns that bottle? Are you the guys that left that gray, dusty stuff laying on a newspaper on the floor?"

"We are those very identical guys," retorted Drayton solemnly.

"Suppose we all compare notes, Mr. Burglar," suggested Viola. "Perhaps we can help each other."

It was after three a. m. before the suggested conference ended. Any animosity which might have existed between robber and robbed was by then buried in the grave of that distant, unregainable past from which all four of them had been so ruthlessly uprooted. From the moment when the three first-comers became assured that Arnold Bertram—self-introduced, and

a very fine name to be sure, as Trenmore commented—was actually a man of their own old, lost world, they welcomed him almost as a brother. There was surprising satisfaction and relief in relating their recent adventures to him. So far as they knew, Bertram was the only man living in whom they could confide, unbranded as outrageous liars. Bertram understood and believed them, and Bertram had good reason to do so. At the conclusion of their story, he frankly explained about the vial.

"I was near down and out," said he. "Nothing doing for weeks, and whatever I put my hand to fizzling like wet firecrackers. Then a good old guy comes along and says to me and Tim—Tim's my side-kick—'Boys, there's a little glass bottle with three dogs' heads on the top. A guy named Trenmore stole it off me. Get it back and there's two thousand round iron men layin' in the bank for each of you! Well, he didn't put that stole it' stuff over on me and Tim. We're wise, all right, but most anybody'd crack a crib for that graft, and he let on the job was an easy one. So we tried it that night and the old gink with us. He would come along, but we wished later we'd made him stay behind. We was goin' to jimmy the trap off the roof, but when we got to your house, Mr. Trenmore, darned if the trap wasn't open. Down we go, the old gink making a noise like a ton of brick; but nobody wakes up. Then we seen the light of a bull's-eye in the front bedroom on the top floor. We sneaks in quiet. There's a guy and his torch just showin' up the neatest kind of an easy, old-fashioned crib. So we knocks this convenient gink on the bean, and opens the crib. There's a few shiners there, but no bottle. Me an' Tim, we was satisfied to take the shiners; but what does this old guy that brung us there do? Why, he flashes a gat, and makes us beat it and leave the stuff layin' there!"

Here Trenmore glanced quizzically as his friend, and again Drayton blushed. Viola, however, was far too intent on the burglar's tale to give heed.

"That must have happened before my brother and Mr. Drayton opened the vial," she observed. "How did you come——"

"I'll get to that in a minute, lady. We'd missed the bottle some way, and the old gazabo he was scared to look any further that night. Next day, though, I goes back on my own, just for a glance around, and there was the front door of your house, Mr. Trenmore, standing wide open. 'Dear me, but these people are friendly,' thinks I 'Come at it from the roof or the street; it's Welcome Home.' So up I goes, and once inside I seen this here bottle, right out in the middle of the floor. The lay seems most too easy, but I picks it up, and then, like the nut I am, I have to go meddling with the gray stuff on the floor, wondering what it is and does the old gink want that, too. He'd let on the bottle was full of gray powder.

"Next thing I knowed the room went all foggy. Then I found I was somewhere else than I ought to be, and hell—beg pardon, lady—but honest, if what I went through didn't send me dippy nothin' ever will!"

It seemed he had almost exactly trod in their footsteps so far as the Market Street Ferry. Beyond that, however, Bertram's adaptable ingenuity had spared him a duplication of their more painful adventures. Though arrested soon after his arrival, he had escaped with proud ease, legalized his status with the "borrowed" identification button, and shortly thereafter a newspaper found on the street had furnished him with a date. "It knocked me all in a heap," said Bertram, "but it give me the pointer I needed." That date had been September 21st, 2118.

"Two centuries!" interpolated Drayton in a sort of groaning undertone.

"Yep. Twenty-one eighteen—an' me born in eighteen eight-four! Old Rip had nothin' on us, eh?"

Recovering from the shock, Bertram had determined to recoup his fortunes, shattered now two hundred years and more. Hence, very naturally, the incident of the fire escape, the open window, and Terence Trenmore's hotel bedroom.

"And now," he concluded, "I've split on myself and I've split on Tim, but hell!—beg pardon, lady—what I want to know is this: What was that gray stuff you guys left layin' on the floor two hundred years ago?"

"I'll tell you," responded Drayton gravely. "It was dust from the rocks of Purgatory, gathered by the great poet Dante, and placed in this crystal vial by a certain Florentine nobleman. Any other little thing you'd like to learn?"

"I guess—not!" The burglar's eyes were fairly popping from his head. "Gee, if I'd heard about that Purgatory stuff, I wouldn't have touched the thing with a pair of tongs!"

"Don't let Mr. Drayton frighten you," laughed Viola. "He has no more idea than yourself what that dust is—or was. That's a foolish old legend, and even Terry doesn't really believe in it."

The Irishman shook his head dubiously. "And if it was not that, then what was it, Viola, my dear?"

Drayton sprang to his feet.

"If we continue talking and thinking about the dust, we shall all end in the madhouse! We are in a tight box and must make the best of it. Before I for my part can believe that this is the year A. D. 2118, some one will need to explain how the Hotel Belleclaire has *remained* the Hotel Belleclaire two centuries, without the change of a button on a bell-hop's coat. But that can wait. I move that we spend what's left of the night in sleep. Perhaps"—he smiled grimly—"whichever one of us is dreaming this nightmare will wake

up sane to-morrow, and we'll get out of it that way!"

CHAPTER XI.

MINE AND COUNTERMINE.

DREAMING or not, they all slept late the following morning, and would probably have slept much later had not Trenmore been roused shortly after nine by the jingle of the house phone.

After answering it, he awakened first Viola, then Drayton and Bertram.

"The foxy-faced gentleman—the one they name the Cleverest—he'll be calling on us it seems. Will you dress yourselves, the way you may be seeing him? This is a business that no doubt concerns us all."

Five minutes later, Terence emerged to find their tight-mouthed, cunning-eyed acquaintance awaiting him in their private parlor.

"'Tis a fine morning," greeted the Irishman cheerfully. After the few hours' rest, he had risen his usual optimistic, easy-going self, sure that A. D. 2118 was as good as any other year to live in. "Will you be seated, sir," he suggested, "and maybe have a bit of breakfast with the four of us?"

"Thank you, no. I have already eaten and shall only detain you a few minutes. Did I understand you to say there are four of you? I was informed of only three."

Trenmore's bushy brows rose in childlike surprise.

"Four," he corrected simply. "Myself and my sister, my friend Bobby Drayton and Mr. Arnold Bertram. Here they are all joining us now. Viola, my dear, this gentleman is Mr. Cleverest, and——"

The man checked him with upraised, deprecating hand.

"Not *Mr.* Cleverest. I am only a Superlative—as yet. But I am charmed

to meet you—er—Viola. What a delightful title! May I ask what it signifies in your own city?"

Trenmore frowned and scratched his head.

"We shall never get anywhere at this rate!" he complained.

Drayton came to the rescue. "It might be better, sir, if we begin by making allowances for entirely different customs, here and—where we came from. 'Viola' is a given name; it is proper to address the lady as Miss Trenmore. My own name is Robert Drayton; that gentleman is Mr. Terence Trenmore, and this is Mr. Arnold Bertram."

Cleverest bowed, though still with a puzzled expression.

"I admit that to me your titles appear to have no meaning, and seem rather long for convenience. As you say, however, it may be best to leave explanations till later. Time presses. Forgive me for dragging you out of bed so early, but there is something you should know before Her Loveliness plunges you into difficulties. She is likely to be here at any moment. May I ask your attention?"

The man was making a patent effort to appear friendly, though after a somewhat condescending manner.

"You are very kind," said Viola, speaking for the first time, "to put yourself out for us, Mr.— How would you wish us to call you, sir?"

"Just Cleverest—or Clever, to my friends," he added with a smirk of his traplike mouth. "I believe my presence and errand are sufficient proof that I wish you for friends. It is well enough for you, Mr.—er—Trenmore, to enter the contest for Strongest. Lovely knows her own hand in that respect. There will be no question of failure. But for you, Miss Trenmore, it is a different pair of shoes. Have you any idea of the duties connected

with the position of Superlatively Domestic?"

"We know nothing," interpolated Trenmore, "about your system of government or your customs at all. 'Tis ignorant children we are, sir, in respect of all those matters."

The man regarded him with narrowed, doubting eyes.

"It seems incredible," he murmured. "But your being here at all is incredible. However, I shall take you at your word. You must at least have observed that all our citizens wear a numbered mark of identification?"

"We have that," conceded Trenmore grimly. "I also observe that you yourself wear a red one, that is blank of any number."

"Oh, I am a Superlative." The man smiled tolerantly. "We officials, like the Servants themselves, have our own distinctive insignia. But the commonalty, who have no titles and are known only as numbers, must conform to the law. Otherwise we should have anarchy, instead of ordered government. From what Mr. Mercy has told me, I gather that you considered the penalty for dereliction in this respect too severe. But our people need to be kept under with a strong hand, or they would turn on us like wolves. They have their opportunity to be of those who make the laws. Most of them, however, are far too lazy or vicious to compete.

"Now these competitions—the Civic Service Examinations, as they are properly named—are conducted on a perfectly fair basis. It is a system as democratic as it is natural and logical. The Superlatives are chosen from the people according to fitness and supreme merit. Thus, our legal fraternity is ruled by the Cleverest—my unworthy self. The Quickest has command of the police force. The Sweetest Singer conducts the civic music. So on through all the offices. Above all, un-

der Penn Service, the Loveliest Woman rules, with a consort who may be at her option either the Cleverest or Strongest of men. The system is really ideal, and whoever originated it deserves the congratulations of all good Philadelphians. You, sir," turning to Drayton, "if you pass as Swiftest, will have control of the City Messenger Service."

"And the Most Domestic?" queried Viola, smiling in spite of herself at this odd distribution of offices.

"Ah, there we come to the rub. The Superlatively Domestic is nominally Superintendent of Scrubwomen and City Scavengers. In practice, she is expected to take a very active and personal part in the Temple housekeeping, while the administrative work really falls to the department of police. When I tell you that the office is at present unfilled, and that the latest incumbent died some time ago from overwork, you will agree with me that you, Miss Trenmore, are unfitted for such a post. Your social position would be intolerable. The other Superlatives would ignore you, while as for the common Numbers, I, for one, would never dream of permitting you to associate with that ill-bred herd!"

"And yet," thought Drayton, "by his own account he must once have been only a Number himself!"

"Now I," continued the Superlative, "have a very different and more attractive proposal to submit."

"And that is?"

Leaning forward, Cleverest's eyes became more cunningly eager.

"I propose that you, Miss Trenmore, supplant the Loveliest herself! It is perfectly feasible. She only holds the position—I mean, there is no chance of your being defeated. Let the woman go to the pit! Her beauty is a thing outworn years ago. But you—— Listen: she threw me over for you, Mr. Trenmore, because she is so sure of

herself that she believes she cannot be supplanted. But she is like every other woman; her skill at politics is limited by her own self-esteem and vanity. She has dallied along for years, putting off her choice of a male consort for one excuse or another, but really because she likes her selfish independence and prefers to keep her very considerable power to herself.

At one time she was a great favorite with His Supremity, and in consequence more or less deferred to by even the Service. At present, however, Mr. Virtue is the only real friend she has among the Servants, and he is growing rather tired of it. Without realizing it, she has for three years been walking on the very thin ice of His Supremity's tolerance. It is true that six months ago she pledged herself to me, which shows that even she is not quite blind. But that was a contract which I, for my part, have never intended to fulfill. I had almost despaired, however, of discovering any really desirable candidate to take her place. Last night when I looked across the Pit I could hardly trust my eyes, Miss Trenmore. You seemed too good to be true. No, really you did! If she had thought about it at all, Lovely would have guessed then that her day was over. Your friends, Miss Trenmore, are my friends, and if you will follow my advice, you and I will end by having this city under our thumbs—like that!"

He made a crushing gesture, which somehow suggested an ultimate cruelty and tyranny beyond anything which Drayton, even, had encountered in his own proper century.

"The Penn Service will give you a free hand," continued the man. "I can promise that as no other living man save one could do. I am—— But never mind that now. Will you take me on as a friend?"

Viola was eying him curiously.

"And this Loveliest—you say she must take her choice in marriage of just those two, Strongest or Cleverest? But Terry will be one of those, and he is my brother!"

"I am not your brother," said Cleverest insinuatingly.

Drayton sprang to his feet, and Tremmore, already standing, made a sudden forward motion. But to their surprise Viola herself waved them to be quiet and smiled very sweetly upon this foxy-faced and cold-blooded suitor.

"I think I may thank you, sir, and accept your alternative. If you are sure that I shall win in this strange competition— And now I am thinking, what do you do with the people who lose their high office? I suppose they go back among the Numbers again?"

The man laughed. "That would never do. Penn Service could never allow that. Any one who fails at a competition, whether he is a candidate or an actual incumbent of office, goes into the pit!"

"Gee!" muttered Bertram succinctly. Then aloud, "Say, mister, I shouldn't think these here Super-what-you-may-call 'em jobs would ever get to be real popular!"

"We are not exactly crowded with applicants," acknowledged the Superlative. "But do not allow yourselves to be troubled on that score. I have excellent reasons for prophesying your success. And now I had best leave you, before her worn-out Loveliness catches me here. She might just possibly upset the apple cart yet? May I rely on you?"

He looked from one to the other with a shifty, yet piercing gaze.

"I think you may." Again Viola smiled upon him in a way that made Drayton writhe inwardly. What hidden side of this beautiful, innocent, girl-child's nature was now being brought to the surface? Did she realize the implications of this thing to

which she was so sweetly agreeing? Her brother stood glum and silent, eyes fixed on the floor. Cleverest, however, his ax having been produced and successfully ground, extended a thin, cold hand to Viola.

"It is refreshing," he declared, "to find brains and the faculty of decision in conjunction with such beauty!"

Viola accepted the hand and the crude compliment with equal cordiality. "May we hope to see you soon again?"

"As early as circumstances allow. Don't let Lovely suspect what's in the wind. Just let her imagine that everything is drifting her way. I'll look after you. Be sure of that!"

And the Superlative departed, leaving behind him a brewing storm which broke almost as quickly as the door closed on his retreating back.

"Viola," growled her brother, and it said much for his anger that there was no endearment in his tone, "is it crazy you have gone? Or is it your intention to offer me *that* for a brother-in-law? Can you not see——"

"Now, just a minute, Terry. What is the title and position of the pleasant-faced gentleman who was here?"

"Cleverest, of course, the cunning-eyed rat! And he said he was at the head of the lawyers, bad luck to the lot of them—begging your sole pardon, Bobby, my boy!"

"Exactly. And is there no one of us who is better fitted for that same office than he that was just now here? Who is it that you've told me was the cleverest lad you ever met, Terry, and the prince of all lawyers?" She smiled mischievously at Drayton. "And why," she continued, "should Loveliest be the only one to receive a surprise on Wednesday? Let Mr. Drayton try for the office he's best trained for. I have faith that this Cleverest of theirs is not the man to win against him."

"I might try——" began Drayton.

Then as the full inference struck him he started and paled, staring with incredulous eyes at Trenmore's sister.

Though a slow flush mounted in her delicate cheeks, she returned his gaze unwaveringly.

"And why not, Mr. Drayton? Would you have me give myself to the present incumbent of that office? And I am asking of you only the protection betrothal would offer me until we may escape from these unkindly folk. Are you not my brother's trusted friend, and may I not trust you also?"

"Before Heaven, you may, Miss Viola," said Drayton simply, but with all the intensity of one taking a holy vow. "Terry, are you willing that I should attempt this thing?"

Trenmore nodded. "As a possible brother-in-law, Bobby, I do certainly prefer you to the other candidate. And by the powers, 'twill be worth all the troubles we've had to see that sly rat's face when you oust him from his precious job!"

"If I oust him," corrected Drayton.

"You'll do it. You've the brains of three of him packed in that handsome skull of yours. But—— Bertram, man, wherever did you get that watch? 'Tis a beautiful timepiece and all, but never the one you had last night!"

"It is, though." The most recent addition to their party turned away, at the same time sliding the watch in his pocket.

"It is not! Let me see it." The Irishman held out his hand with a peremptory gesture.

Somewhat sullenly the little round man obeyed the command. It was, as Trenmore had said, a beautiful watch; a thin hunting-case model and engraved "J. S. to C. June 16, 2114." The watch was attached to a plain fob of black silk, terminating in a ruby of remarkable size and brilliance, set in platinum. Trenmore looked up from his examination sternly.

8BThrill

"Who is 'C.'? Never mind. I can guess! I remember how you brushed against the man as you went to open the door for him to go out."

"Well, and what if I did?" grumbled Bertram. "That Cleverest guy ain't no real friend of yours, is he?"

To Drayton's surprise, Viola laughed outright. "Mr. Burglar, you should change your habits once in two thousand years at least! Had you looked into that pit of theirs, as we did, you'd not be lifting things from a man who can send you there. Terry, how would it do to let Mr. Bertram try for the office of Quickest? He is that, by this piece of work, and on the police force he'd be——"

Her brother drowned the sentence in a great shout of mirth.

"You've the right of it, little sister! 'Tis the very post for him. Bertram, my round little lad, would that keep you out of mischief do you think?"

Bertram grinned sheepishly. "It ain't such a bad idea," he conceded. "They tell me there's lots of graft to be picked up on the force. And say, it would be some fun to be ordering a bunch of cops around! I'm on, Mr. Trenmore!"

CHAPTER XII.

THE NEW CITY.

BY the evening of that day the four castaways of Time had acquired a better knowledge of the city, its odd customs and odder laws, than had been theirs during Cleverest's morning call. The Loveliest had kept her word and more than kept it. She had called for them in her car, amiably accepted their rather lame excuses for Bertram's presence, and insisted on an immediate shopping expedition to supply their more pressing needs in the way of clothing and toilette necessities.

On leaving the hotel she bestowed upon each of her protégés a plain green

button. These, she explained, denoted that the wearer was of the immediate family of a Superlative. She had arranged with "Virty" to stretch a point for convenience sake, and so protect her wards *pro tempore*. Connections of Penn Servants, it seemed, wore similar buttons, but purple in color. No wearer of a button of either hue, she assured them, would ever be troubled by the police unless at the direct command of a Servant. This seemed a sweeping assertion, but they assumed that it did not cover such a person in the commission of actual crime. Later they were not so sure.

The most curious impression which Drayton received upon this brief expedition was that of the intense, commonplace familiarity of everything he saw, complicated by a secret undercurrent of differences too deep to be more than guessed at. The stores were the same. The streets were the same. The people were—not quite the same. Not only did both men and women appear to have undergone positive physical deterioration, but the look in their eyes was different.

These nameless, yellow-tagged Numbers who thronged the streets wore a hangdog, spiritless appearance, as if caring little what their labor or their goings to and from might bring them.

Everywhere the most profound, even slavish, respect was accorded to the Loveliest and her party. Evidently she was well known throughout the city.

Before entering the stores, she took them to luncheon and played the part of munificent hostess so well that all of them, save perhaps Mr. Bertram, were more than half ashamed of their secret alliance with her jilted betrothed, the Cleverest.

One thing she did later, however, which cleared Viola's conscience. At one of the larger department stores, she insisted on purchasing for the girl a great supply of gingham aprons, dust

caps and plain, practical house dresses. "You will need them, my dear," she assured affectionately. "Now, don't demur! If you are to keep up your position as Superlatively Domestic you will require *at least* four dozen of each!"

Viola, more amused than annoyed, let the woman have her way. "Just picture me," she murmured aside to Drayton. "Picture poor little me cleaning the whole inside of City Hall! Isn't she the dear, though?"

Everything was to be charged, they discovered, to that benevolent institution "Penn Service." Trenmore, who made it a practice to carry a considerable amount of money about him, wished to pay. The woman scoffed at the notion.

"You'll soon get over the idea of paying for anything," she declared. "But tell me; how do you come to have money? I thought you said you had just reached the city. Is it money you brought with you? May I see it?"

Trenmore handed her some silver and a ten-dollar bill.

"Why, what curious little medals—and how pretty they are! Would you mind giving me these as a keepsake?"

"Not at all, madam," Trenmore responded gravely. Despite her obvious efforts to please, the woman's company and her open devotion to himself were becoming increasingly distasteful. As he complained to Drayton, he did not like the green eyes of her! "I suppose your own coins are different?" he queried.

"We don't use coins—is that what you call them?—for exchange. The common Numbers have their certificates of labor, somewhat like this piece of paper of yours. They are not green and yellow, though, but red, stamped with the number of hours in black. They are free to spend these as they please. But the Servants of Penn and we Superlatives charge everything to the Service."

"You mean the city pays?"

"Oh, no. These stores must do their part toward the government upkeep. That is only just. We levy on all the people equally—on the merchant and property-holder for goods; on the laborer for a portion of his time, if we require it. Penn Service makes no exceptions."

She said this with an air of great virtue, but Drayton commented: "That must be rather hard on any merchant or worker you particularly favor—especially a man of small capital or large family."

"It keeps them in line," she retorted, with a somewhat cruel set to her thin red lips.

"But," objected Drayton, harking back to the matter of money, "if your currency is not based on gold or silver, how does it possess any stability?"

"I don't know what you mean. The Service sets a valuation on the different sorts of labor. For instance, if an expert accountant and a street cleaner each work one hour, the accountant will receive credit for ten hours and the scavenger credit for half an hour. I suppose you might say the system is based on working time."

"And the value is not set by either employer or employed?"

Her eyes widened. "Let the Numbers say how much a man's labor is worth? Whoever heard of such a thing! Why, they would grind each other into the ground."

"They are at least free to work for each other or not as they please, I suppose?"

"Certainly. Why, they are perfectly free in every way. They even own all the property—except the Temple itself and the officials' private residences."

Drayton was hopelessly at sea. Was this system a tyranny, as he had indefinitely suspected, or was it the freest and most orderly of governments?

"Forgive my stupidity," he apolo-

gized. "I don't even yet understand. Instead of the dollar you make an hour's labor the unit and then set a fixed schedule of labor value. But the work of two men at the same job is hardly ever of equal worth. How do you——"

"Wait," she broke in impatiently. "When you are yourself one of us, sir, you may understand these arrangements better. Penn Service owns practically nothing; but it rules everything. It is perfectly impartial. One man's labor is as good as another's. Any one who refused to give or take a certificate would have the Service to deal with."

"And yet the Service itself never pays for anything and takes what it likes of goods or labor. But according to that your whole population are mere slaves, and their ownership of property a mockery! Who are these Servants of Penn that hold such unheard-of power?"

She stared at him, a hard look in her green eyes.

"The Masters of the City," she retorted briefly. "It is not suitable that we discuss them here and now. Wait until to-morrow. Then you yourself will become, I hope, a Superlative, and as such will receive all the necessary information."

The ex-lawyer accepted the snub meekly, but dared one further question.

"Are Mercy and Judge Virtue Servants of Penn?"

"Mr. Mercy and Mr. Virtue are both of the Inner Order. You will do very well not to cross their path—er—Drayton."

He made no further comment, but determined to use every opportunity to get at the true inwardness of this singular system and the toleration of it by the so-called "Numbers." Were all other cities like this? They must be, he thought, or no one would choose this one to live in.

The Loveliest herself seemed strangely devoid of curiosity regarding her protégés' past lives and histories. Indeed, twice she checked Trenmore when he would have volunteered information along this line. "You must not tell me these things," she declared. "Even we Superlatives are not permitted to learn of other places and customs—are not supposed to know that such exist!"

At this preposterous statement Bertram, who had been going about with an air of pained boredom, became interested.

"Say, lady, don't none of you folks ever go traveling nowheres?"

Had he suggested something indelicate, she could have looked no more horrified.

"Traveling outside of Philadelphia? I should *hope* not! Besides, such an outrage would never be permitted, I assure you."

"But you must have some communication with the outer world?" puzzled Viola. "We saw the trains and the passengers at the ferry. And where do all these things come from that we see in the stores?"

"My dear, we have many local trains, of course, but the interstate commerce is entirely in the hands of Penn Service. Our laborers here manufacture certain articles; our farmers raise certain produce. These things are turned over to the Service who reserve a share to themselves for expense. Then they exchange it outside the boundaries; but it is all done by the secret agents and I have never bothered my head about it. The matter is outside the province of my administration."

"How long has this sort of thing gone on?" persisted Drayton.

"My dear sir, and all of you, why will you ask such absurd and impossible questions? Can't you understand that we Philadelphians have no concern either with the past or with anything outside our own boundaries? The

law says, let every good citizen live his own life. It is forbidden that he should do more than that. The past is a dead letter. Nobody can live in it. It is as much as we can do to handle the present."

"Do you mean to tell us," gasped the lawyer, "that you know nothing of this city's history?"

"Certainly I mean that. Most of these people that you see would not understand your meaning should you ask them such a question. I was educated privately by one of the Servants of Penn." She said it as one might boast of having been brought up by the King of England in person. "I am able to converse intelligently, I hope, on any reasonable subject. But even I never received such absurdly needless instruction as that."

"But—what are the children taught in your schools?"

"The natural, useful things. Cooking, carpentry, weaving—all the necessary trades. What use would any more be to them? It would only make them dissatisfied, and goodness knows they are already dissatisfied and ungrateful enough!"

"Well," sighed Trenmore, "whoever has done these things to your people could give the old Tweed ring cards and spades and sweep the board!"

Half playfully, she shook her head at him.

"Big man," she rebuked, "I don't altogether understand you, but take care of your words. I like you too well to wish to see you die! Penn Service is sacred. Never speak against it, even when you believe yourself alone or in the safest company. It has a million eyes and a million ears, and they are everywhere. And now, let me take you back to the Belleclaire. After to-morrow I will see you more suitably lodged. To-night, however, you must

put up as best you may with its inconvenience and bareness."

Its "inconvenience and bareness," however, amounted to luxury in the eyes of these benighted wanderers from another age. They were very well content to have one more evening alone together. The Loveliest, it seemed, was attending an important social function to which, until they had actually claimed their laurels in the approaching competition, she could not take them.

"Nobody is anybody here," she said, "except the Servants themselves, the Superlatives and the family connections of each. There are only three or four hundred of us, all told, but we manage to keep the social ball rolling. I can promise you a gay winter. Now, don't attempt to go out on the streets."

Trenmore frowned. He had a secret desire to visit 17—Walnut Street and—of course he wouldn't find the place unchanged, and the dust still lying there on the library floor. But he wished to look, at least. "Why not?" he inquired.

"Because I am responsible for your appearance at the contests to-morrow. Don't be offended. Should anything happen to you it would not only make me very unhappy, but might cause me serious trouble. The competitions are held in the Temple to-morrow at high noon. I'll call for you early and see to it that everything goes through just right. You've no idea what a pleasant future lies in store for you, big man!"

"Oh, haven't I, though?" muttered Trenmore as he stood with the others in the lobby and watched her retreating back. "Madam Green-eyes, it's yourself has a pleasant surprise on its way to you, and I'm the sorry man to see trouble come to any woman, but it's yourself deserves it, I'm thinking—and anyway, I couldn't let my little sister Viola be made the slave you'd gladly see her, or I've misread the green eyes of you!"

"What's that you're saying, Terry?" queried Drayton.

"Just a benediction on the kind-hearted lady, Bobby. Bertram, where are you off to? Didn't you hear herself saying we are all to stop inside?"

"Aw, say, boss, I'm fair smothered. That doll would talk the hind wheel off a street car. It wasn't me she went bail for and I won't get in no trouble."

"See that you don't, then," counseled Trenmore, and let him go.

CHAPTER XIII.

PENN SERVICE.

THEIR day had been so fully occupied that none of the three had found time to seek that purveyor of plentiful information, the newspaper. Indeed, now that he thought of it, Drayton could not recall having seen any newsboys or news stands, and on consulting his friends they, too, denied any such memory. Yet that papers were still published in the city was certain. Mercy had carried one in the golden Court of Justice. Bertram had accounted for his knowledge of the date by reference to the paper he had found in the street.

Drayton went to the house phone and made his request. Something seemed wrong with the wire. While he could perfectly hear the girl at the other end, that young lady appeared unable to catch his meaning. Suddenly she cut him off, and though he snapped the receiver hook impatiently, it produced no further response.

"Ring for a boy, Bobby," suggested Trenmore. As he said it, however, there came a rapping at the door. Trenmore opened it and there stood a dignified gentleman who bowed courteously and stepped inside.

"I am the assistant manager," he explained. "There was some trouble over the phone just now. The management

desires, of course, that guests of Penn Service shall receive every attention. What were you trying to make that stupid operator understand?"

"Nothing very difficult," smiled Drayton. "I asked for an evening paper."

"I beg your pardon. A—what?"

"A paper—a newspaper," retorted the lawyer impatiently.

"But, my dear sir! Surely you can't mean to make such an extraordinary request! Or—perhaps you have a special permit?"

A dazed silence ensued. "Are you telling me," burst forth Terence, "that in this God-forsaken place you need a permit to read the news of the day?"

"Every one knows," protested the manager placatingly, "that only Servants or their families are permitted to read the newspaper issued for their benefit."

Trenmore made a violent forward movement, and Drayton, after one glance at the giant's darkening countenance, hastily pushed the manager into the hall, assured him that their request was withdrawn and closed the door.

Not five minutes later, Cleverest was again announced. He followed the phone call so closely that Drayton had hardly hung up the receiver before he was at the door. He entered with a frown and a very pale face.

"See here," he began without greeting or preamble, "are you people trying to commit suicide? How can you expect protection if you persist in running foul of every law in the city?"

"Why the excitement?" queried Drayton coolly.

"The excitement, as you call it, is of your making. How dare you attempt to pry among the secret affairs of Penn Service?"

Drayton shook his head. "Can't imagine what you mean. We've not been out of this suite since the Loveliest brought us back to the hotel."

"That may be. But you were try-

ing to bribe the manager to supply you with a copy of the *Penn Bulletin!*"

Enlightenment dawned in the minds of his three hearers.

"And is that all?" asked Trenmore scornfully. "As for bribe, we never offered the lad the price of a penny. Did he claim we tried to bribe him?"

"He hinted at it. He met me at the door, and by Jove, it was a good thing he did! He was on his way to report you at the Temple!"

"Is it a capital crime, then, to wish to read a paper?"

Still frowning, Cleverest sank into a chair.

"What you need is a little common or kindergarten instruction. A bit more and you'll have us all in the pit for conspiracy. To begin, then, are you aware that no one in this city, barring those born in Penn Service or the officials under their control, is allowed to read any literature more informing than a sign post, an instruction pamphlet or a telephone directory? The only books, the only papers, the only manuscripts in existence are circulated and confined strictly to the Temple and the Temple people. The Supreme Servant himself is the only man having access to the more important documents and books, although there is a lesser library open to officials who care for study.

"Furthermore, the City of Philadelphia having reached a state of perfection under the beneficent power of Penn, his Servants have made it their business to keep it so. Advance or retrogression would be alike objectionable. That is obvious and logical. Everything is most exquisitely standardized. To change so much as a syllable of the language, a style in garments, the architecture or interior arrangement of a building, is rightly regarded as a capital offense. No man, saving the Servants or their emissaries, is allowed to pass outside city limits. No stranger in my time or knowledge

has ever crossed them from without. You yourselves are the sole exceptions."

"But," puzzled Drayton, "how does Penn Service keep the city in subjection? We come from a place of far different customs and spirit, where innumerable armed troops would be required for such a business. You have only the usual police."

The man laughed. "There is a fear more restraining than the fear of bullets. Penn, the mighty All-Father, stands behind his Servants and justifies their acts." The Superlative spoke reverently, but it was a threadbare reverence through which gleamed more than a hint of mockery. "Do you recall," he continued, "that great Red Bell which hangs beneath the golden Dome of Justice? There is a saying in this city, 'When the Bell strikes, we die.' It is named the Threat of Penn. The people believe implicitly that should the Servants become incensed and strike that Bell, the city, the people, the very earth itself would dissolve into air like thin smoke! I myself can't tell you how this supersti—I should say, this faith originated. But it is a very deep-rooted and convenient one. Have you any other questions?"

"One more, and it is this. During the day I have heard Penn Service referred to as sacred. Last night the judge spoke of the 'sacred precincts.' What we called city hall you call the Temple. Just now you referred to 'Penn, the mighty All-Father.' Is Penn Service a religious organization?"

The other stared. "Religious? That is a word I have never before heard. Penn is the All-Father. The Numbers worship and pray to him. Immobile and benevolent he stands, high above our petty affairs, speaking to none save his Servants. Through his wisdom they, the twelve great Servants of Penn, are the supreme and only power—the Masters of his City!"

CHAPTER XIV.

THE THREAT OF PENN.

DRAYTON sighed deeply. "We are indebted to you, sir, for your frankness. In future we will certainly try to keep out of trouble."

"I trust you will." Cleverest rose to take his departure. "I've set my heart on upsetting Lovely's little game. By the way, where is that other chap—Bertram, you call him?"

"He went out. He'll be back soon. We had thought of entering Bertram for Quickest—that is, if you have no objection?"

The Superlative looked startled, then smiled oddly.

"Oh, no possible objection, of course. Good day to you all. And to you, dearest lady! I shall be first at your side when you reach the Temple to-morrow."

Speaking of Bertram, however, had recalled something to Viola. "Just a moment, Mr. Cleverest. I beg your pardon. Cleverest, then. Terry, have you that watch?"

"Did I lose it here?" Cleverest's eyes lighted as Trenmore extended the expensive timepiece.

"It fell from your pocket—perhaps?" suggested Viola demurely,

"I am a thousand times obliged to you, Miss Trenmore. That watch was given me by my uncle, Mr. Justice Supreme. The old gentleman would never have forgiven me if I had lost it."

"So, he's the nephew of Mr. Justice Supreme, is he?" murmured Viola, when the Superlative had at last departed. "Now I wonder if that relationship is the card he has up his sleeve?"

"Viola, if you've an inkling of further mystery, save it till I'm rested from what we've had," protested her brother. "Let's ring for the servant the way

we'll be having our suppers. I think we do need them!"

That night Mr. Arnold Bertram did not return to the Hotel Belleclaire. Moreover, Trenmore discovered with some annoyance that the Cerberus was again missing. He had thrust the thing in his pocket and forgotten it. Now the vial was gone, either lost in the streets, or, more probably, again confiscated by their rotund and assimilative friend the burglar.

Morning came, but no Bertram. Drayton was first dressed, and he was waiting in the parlor when the others appeared. A moment of silence was followed by a sudden deep chuckle from Trenmore and a little shriek from Viola.

"Why, you two absurd men!" she cried. "You're wearing exactly the same things as yesterday! You haven't even had them pressed! Terry, your trousers look as if you'd slept in them—not a sign of a crease. What will your true love be thinking?"

Trenmore flung back his head with a comical look of defiance. "Let her think what she likes. I've no liking for goods no better than stole, Penn Service or no Penn Service! I pay for my clothes, or I'll wear none. But you've no cause to be talking, Viola. 'Where's the pretty new gown you were to be wearing? And Bobby, what about those fine ash-grays you were choosing so carefully yesterday?'"

"I meant to wear them. If we intended to keep faith with the lady who provided them, I should certainly have worn them. As it is——" Drayton shrugged.

"And I," confessed Viola, "couldn't bring myself to touch anything that woman gave me. She must take us as we are or not at all. It's ten o'clock—and there's the telephone. I expect that is my Lady Green-eyes."

It was. She looked disappointed and more than a trifle hurt when she saw

their costumes and learned their intention not to change. She herself was resplendent in a princess gown of pale-yellow charmeuse, under a magnificent fitted coat of Irish lace. Trenmore placated her for their shabby appearance as best he could, and dropping that subject, though with obvious annoyance, the Loveliest inquired for the missing Bertram.

"We've no idea at all where he is, madam. He went out last night, though I argued it with him, and we've seen hide nor hair of the lad since that time."

She seemed little concerned. "He will probably show up at the Temple. If he has lost his green button and got himself arrested, he is sure to be there. Shall we go now?"

Descending to the lady's car, they found Broad Street crowded with an immense and mostly stationary throng. Narrow lanes had been cleared by the police for such pedestrians and motor cars as might prefer moving along. A few cars belonging, they were informed, to various officials, were parked in the middle of the street.

"What are they all waiting for?" queried Viola.

"For the competitions. They don't often take so much interest. This time the Numbers have a candidate for musical director, and they are waiting for blocks around until the result is announced."

Drayton wondered why such a large percentage of the population were concerned over an apparently unimportant office; but he made no comment.

The run from the hotel to the former city hall was a short one. As the car swung into the open traffic lane, Drayton looked ahead. There, closing the brief vista, loomed that huge gray bulk of masonry which is the heart—the center—the very soul, as one might say, of the ancient Quaker City.

From the street no sign of the golden

dome was visible, nor any exterior hint of the vast innovations within. There rose the tower upon whose pinnacle, visible for many a mile around, stood the giant figure of that good old Quaker, his vast hand forever outstretched in gentle blessing. There he stood, as he had stood for troublous centuries. Below him was the familiar clock—and a wraith of white steam obscured its face. Drayton remembered how, on previous visits to Philadelphia, that wraith of white steam had prevented him from seeing the time. The wind was perpetually blowing it across. And Broad Street— He had once been here through a city election. All Broad Street had been crowded, just as it was crowded now, with people in fixed masses before the bulletin boards. The bulletins were missing now, but what other difference was there—in appearance?

A yellow multiplicity of numbered buttons and—yes, the emblem displayed above the Public Building's southern entrance. Then it had been a huge replica of the Knight Templar insignia, with "Welcome K. T." in varicolored bulbs. Now the emblem was a sword-crossed bell. Above it gleamed four ominous figure—2118. *That* was the difference.

Drayton emerged from his homesick comparisons to find that the car was drawing up at the curb. Where had once been an open archway were doors of studded iron. A traffic policeman hurried forward and hustled the crowd aside. He used his stick freely, but the crowd did not even growl. It sickened Drayton rather—not so much the blows, as the spirit in which they were taken. Had the backbone of this people been entirely softened in the vinegar of even two centuries of oppression? And these were his own people, or their descendants—his fellow Americans! That hurt.

Doubtless, however, as he became ad-

justed to new usages, the injustice and oppressions of the year A. D. 2118 would see no more intolerable than the tyrannies and injustices of the early twentieth century.

The iron doors swung wide and closed silently behind the little party. They found themselves in a long corridor, walled and floored with polished red marble, artificially lighted and lined with doors, paneled with frosted glass. "Part of the administrative section," explained the Loveliest, as she hurried them along the passage. "These are all offices of the different departments. Would you care to see the crowd under the Dome from the balcony?"

Without waiting for assent, she led the way up a short flight of red marble stairs. Suddenly they had emerged from beneath a low arch and were looking out into the space beneath the Dome of Justice. They stood upon a little balcony. Out from it extended a narrow bridge of planking to the rough scaffold that hung about the Red Bell.

Beneath the Dome the milk-white floor was not longer visible. They looked down upon a sea of heads. The people were packed so closely that had there come one of those swaying motions common to crowds many must inevitably have been trampled. Only at the northern side was a space cleared and roped off. In the center of this space was the eagle and dove symbol that hid the pit. At the far side a throne of carved and jeweled gold had been set on a high dais, draped with pale-blue and yellow banners. Throne and dais were empty, but close about the roped-off space was drawn a cordon of uniformed police. Save for these, who wore their regulation caps, not a head in the great hall was covered. Silent, patient, bareheaded, they stood—the despised "Numbers," packed too tightly for even the slight relief of motion, waiting.

Drayton wondered what it was about

them that seemed so strange—so unearthly. Then it came to him. They were silent. Except for a faint rustling sound, like dry leaves in a breeze, the space beneath the golden dome was entirely silent. One could have closed one's eyes and fancied oneself alone.

Said Trenmore, "Are they dumb, these people of yours?"

Low though he had spoken, his voice reverberated from the shallow Dome as from a sounding board. The dark sea of heads became flecked with white, as faces were turned toward the balcony. Leaning her gloved elbows on the golden rail, the Loveliest looked indifferently down.

"They are not permitted to speak within the sacred precincts. Most of them have stood these three hours past, and they have another two hours to wait. They are all so lazy that I don't imagine they mind. Anything, rather than to be at work!"

"Some of those women have babies in their arms," observed Viola pityingly.

The Loveliest shrugged. "Don't ask me why they are here. It's a foolish old custom, and I am glad to say this is the last of it. Mr. Justice Supreme has ordered that hereafter the competitions shall be held in private. We had best go around to the north side now. I'll find out if Mr. J. S. is ready to receive you. I persuaded Virty to arrange for a presentation. Mr. J. S. is just a trifle difficult in his old age, but he won't interfere."

Interfere with what? Drayton wondered. Then the question slipped from his mind as his eye lighted on a curious thing at the back of the balcony.

It was a sword; a huge, unwieldy weapon, fully seven feet in length. The broad blade was of polished blue steel, inlaid to the hilt with gold. The grip, such of it as could be seen, was of gold studded with rough turquoise. Too large and heavy, surely, for human

wielding, the sword was held upright in the grip of a great bronze hand, the wrist of which terminated in the wall at about the height of a man's chest from the floor.

"And what weapon is that?" inquired Trenmore.

"That? Oh, that is part of the Threat. You see the hand that holds it? That is the so-called 'Hand of Penn.' From the tower above, his hand is extended in blessing. Down here it grasps the sword. It is attached to a sort of mechanical arm, long enough to pass halfway across the Hall of Justice. The arm runs back through the wall there, between the ceiling of the corridor and the floor above. It is controlled by a mechanism to which only the Servants hold a key."

"And what happens when the queer machine is used?" asked Trenmore. It seemed a useless invention, on the face of it.

"It isn't used," she replied with an amused smile. "If it ever were, the hand would drop so that the sword was level; then shoot out and the sword's point would strike the edge of that Red Bell and recoil. Of course, it couldn't strike now, because of the scaffolding. Mr. J. S. has an idea that the bell will look well with a ring of red electric lamps around it. They are wiring it for that."

"The sword is a kind of elaborate gong-striking device then," commented Drayton. He recalled Cleverest's description of the singular dread in which the Red Bell was held by the Numbers. "What would happen if it were used?" he queried in turn.

"Oh, the city would go up in smoke, I suppose." The woman laughed as she said it. Clearly she herself had no great faith in the probability of such a catastrophe.

"But how do your people imagine that a miracle of that sort could be brought about?" persisted Drayton.

"You do ask such questions! By a special dispensation of our Lord Penn, I suppose. Will you come with me, please? Under no circumstances must His Supremacy be kept waiting."

They followed her, back into the red corridor, and thence through a long series of luxurious living apartments, smoking, lounging, and drawing-rooms, each furnished in a style compatible only with great wealth or the system of "credit" peculiar to Penn Service. Crossing the old patrol entrance, they at last reached that part of the Temple which was held consecrate to the use of the highest Servant, Mr. Justice Supreme. While possessing several residences in various pleasant locations, he preferred, the lady informed them, to live almost entirely in the Temple. To the visitors, this "Temple," with its more or less resident "Servants" bore a close resemblance to a clubhouse for luxury-loving millionaires.

They waited in an anteroom with their guide, who had given her card and a penciled message to one of the half-dozen uniformed page boys who lounged there. The lad returned with a verbal message to the effect that Mr. Justice Supreme begged to be excused.

At almost the same moment Cleverest emerged from the door leading to the inner sanctum. He came straight to them with a smile of welcome which made him look almost good humored. Close behind appeared the plethoric Mr. Virtue.

"I declare, Virty, it's too bad!" began Loveliest indignantly. "You promised that you would arrange a presentation!"

Mr. Virtue, looking worried and more than a little annoyed, shook his head. "I can't help it. I couldn't see him myself, Lovely. Clever's been with him all morning. Ask him what the trouble is!"

She turned a glance of sharp suspi-

cion upon her fellow Superlative. "Did you have anything to do with this, Clever? If you did——"

"To do with what?" inquired Cleverest blandly. "His Supremity is somewhat indisposed, and is conserving his strength for the ceremonies. You have no cause for anxiety. I explained things to him myself. There will be no trouble. You really owe me a debt of gratitude, Lovely. The dear old gentleman has always been rather fond of the present Strongest. I had quite a little job persuading him that your candidate was in every way more deserving."

She watched him with a puzzled frown. Then her brow cleared, her eyes opened wide with that dark distension of the pupils which was a trick of theirs.

"Why, Clever," she beamed, "I'm tremendously obliged to you. I never thought you really—cared enough to do anything like that for me. Particularly now!"

He smiled, with a barefaced assumption of hurt tenderness which would have deceived none but the most vain and assured of women.

"You've never done me justice, Lovely. Don't thank me until the competitions are over. When the job's done I shall feel more worthy! Come along to the Green Room. Nearly every one else is there."

The "Green Room" proved to be a long, wide chamber with windows on one side only, opening out upon the Hall of Justice. In the center of that side, level with the pavement, opened the northern door, which varied from the other two in being of the same scarlet hue as the Red Bell. The room itself was done entirely in green, a thick velvet carpet of that color covering the floor like moss, and the walls being decorated in a simulation of foliage. The place was well filled. By the law, it seemed, every Superlative physically able to be present must appear at the

Civic Service Examinations, held once in four years. Most of them had brought members of their families.

All wore the green or red buttons of Superlativism, and all were dressed with a gayety which verged—in many cases more than verged—on distinct vulgarity. For some reason of etiquette none of the Servants' womenfolk were present. The three visitors were therefore unable to pass judgment on those greatest of great ladies. The gathering present, however, represented if not the cream, at least the top milk of twenty-second century society. Though it was morning, the only women present whose gowns were not almost painfully décolleté were Viola Trenmore, Loveliest, and two or three very young girls. Colors shrieked at one another, or were gagged to silence by an overpowering display of jewelry. Some of the older and plainer ladies were quite masked in the enamel of their complexions. Not one of the youngest but was frankly rouged and powdered.

The Loveliest took her protégés about the room, presenting them to the various officials and their wives. She seemed on the most familiar terms with the men, but the women, while they addressed her with formal respect, cast glances at her back tinged with anything but affection.

The only Superlative not present was the Swiftest, Chief of the Messenger Service. "Laid up with another bad attack of rheumatism," Mr. Virtue explained sympathetically.

"He'll be laid up with worse than that after the contests," grinned Cleverest, with a meaning wink at Drayton.

The latter smiled back, but the effort was mechanical. They boasted of the fair and open nature of these contests, and at the same time talked of the results as a foregone conclusion. The ex-lawyer wondered what ghost of a chance he had to supplant this man, nephew of Justice Supreme, and

so sure of his ability to undermine Loveliest, herself a person of influence and evident power. He had the ghastly feeling of a man walking on thin crust above unknown fires. There was too little that they understood; too much that hinted of subterranean movements and powers which at any moment might writhe and cast them all into that theatrical, deadly pit, beneath the Dove of Peace.

Then he heard the green-eyed lady's voice again, speaking in the silkiest of tones. "And this, my friends, is our Chief of Contractors, the Strongest. Stringy, let me make you acquainted with Mr. Trenmore. And Miss Trenmore. This little lady is to try her hand at domesticity, Stringy. I don't imagine there will be any competition—not for *that* office."

The official whom she disrespectfully misaddressed as "Stringy" fitted his nickname better than his real title of Strongest. He was a tall, long-limbed, lean man, with a very red face and sunburned neck. He glanced pityingly at Viola. From her his gaze turned anxiously to the huge giant of a man with whom he was shortly to contend not only for continuance in office, but life itself. He started to say something, choked, and, turning abruptly, hurried off to lose himself in the crowd of his more fortunate fellows.

"Somebody has tipped Stringy off," laughed Mr. Virtue. "Hi, there, Merry! Whither away?"

But the ineffable Mr. Mercy jerked roughly from his friend's detaining hand and without a glance for the rest of the party passed on through the door leading to the inner sanctuary.

"He's sore, too," growled Virtue. "Lovely, you're getting me in bad all around."

"Merry will get over it," she replied indifferently. "He never thinks of any one but himself. Outside of that he's a good sort. I'll square things for you,

Virty, once this examination is over. What was it you said, Mr. Drayton?"

"Is there any objection," repeated Drayton, "to my wandering about a bit? The decorative schemes of these rooms are wonderful. I used to be interested in such things, as a boy. You don't mind?"

"Not at all. Go over toward the eastern side, though, away from Mr. J. S.'s sanctum. And be back here within the half hour."

"I will. Terry, you don't mind if I leave you?"

"Go ahead," assented the Irishman, and Viola nodded abstractedly. She was staring out at that pathetically silent multitude in the Hall of Justice.

As a matter of fact, the lawyer craved solitude for thought. The more time he spent in this Temple of Justice, the more he became convinced of the puerility of their own light-hearted schemes.

Viola's reflections, had he known it, were no shade less gloomy than his own. Quick-brained, intuitive to a degree, the psychic atmosphere of the place, combined with hints picked up here and there, had shaken her assurance to its foundations. She could think of nothing but Drayton's well-nigh certain failure and its inevitable toll of disaster. She herself would then be the promised bride of a man she instinctively loathed, while Drayton—but there she halted, unable to contemplate the hideous face which once more threatened.

Her reverie was interrupted by her brother. The Loveliest had deserted him temporarily and was engaged with some of her friends across the room. The two Trenmores conversed for some time undisturbed; then Terry drew out his watch.

"Viola, it's 11:45 and Bobby is not yet back. Where can the lad be lingering, do you think?"

Before the girl could reply, Loveliest hurried over to them.

"You must go out into the hall now, big man. You, too, my dear."

"Not without Mr. Drayton," stipulated Viola firmly. "He has not returned!"

Loveliest frowned. "We certainly cannot wait for him! I warned him to be back here by half past eleven."

"I'll go look for him," volunteered Trenmore; but Lady Green-eyes checked him.

"I can send an officer if you really can't get along without him. He is probably lost somewhere in the corridors. Here comes Mr. Justice Supreme. I told you it was late!"

A green baize door at the end of the room had swung open. Through it filed several men, all attired in the same frock coats, light trousers, patent-leather pumps and spats which distinguished Mercy and Virtue from the common herd. They also possessed similar silk hats, and wore them, though they and the police were the only male persons within the Temple with covered heads. The hats, evidently, were further marks of distinction, like a bishop's miter or the splendid crown of royalty.

Having passed through the door, they divided into two ranks, the last man at the end on each side holding wide the two halves of the door. There followed a pause, during which a solemn hush settled throughout the Green Room.

Through the open doorway emerged the figure of a very old man. He was bent, shaking, decrepit with a loathsome senility. His face was shaven and his clothes the apotheosis of dandyism. His coat curved in at the waist, his shoes were two mirrors, his hat another. He wore a yellow chrysanthemum as a boutonnière, and from his eyeglasses depended a broad black ribbon. His vest was of white flowered satin. His hands were ungloved yellow claws, and in one of them he car-

ried an ivory-headed ebony cane. With the latter he felt his way like a blind man, and supported himself in his slow and tremulous progress.

His face! It was lined and scarred by every vice of which Clever's younger countenance had hinted. His pale-blue eyes, rheumy and red-rimmed, blinked evilly above purple pouches. Over ragged yellow teeth his mouth worked and snarled, as though mumbling a continuous, silent curse against life and all mankind.

Looking neither to right nor left, he hobbled between the ranks of the lesser Servants. Promptly, as he passed, they closed in behind and followed him—on and across the Green Room toward the door which led to his great golden throne, set in the Hall of Justice.

And the people in the room bowed very reverently as he passed by—bowed and looked relieved that he had gone without a word to them.

Staring fascinated, Viola and her brother were startled by a whisper at their shoulders.

"Old J. S. has had a bad night. He looks grouchier than usual!"

It was the irrepressible Loveliest. "Come over to the window," she continued as the door closed behind the last of the Servants. "I'll tell you exactly who's who. You see that man helping His Supremity up the steps of the dais? That is Mr. Courage, his right-hand man. And just behind is Mr. Kindness. That short, thin one is Mr. Power; the old fellow that drags one leg is Mr. Purity. Then come Mr. Pity, Mr. Contentment, and Mr. Love. And there goes good old Virty, looking as if his last friend had died; just

because Mercy cut him, I suppose, and he blames me for it. But they're all alike—they never think of any one but themselves. I suppose Merry is sulking somewhere, too. Those are all the Servants who are here to-day. There are twelve altogether. And now you really must go to your places. I've sent a man to look for your friend and I'll have him brought out to you as soon as he is found. I have to stay here with the other Superlatives until my place is called; but of course that is merely a formality. The only candidates up are yourselves, and that boy the Numbers are trying to wedge in as Musical Director. Here, Fifty-three," she addressed their old acquaintance, the police sergeant, "look after my friends, will you? Well the nerve of him! Will you look at Clever? He's gone right up on the dais with the Servants! I don't care if Mr. J. S. is his uncle, Clever has no right to push himself forward like that—not while he's holding a Superlative office!"

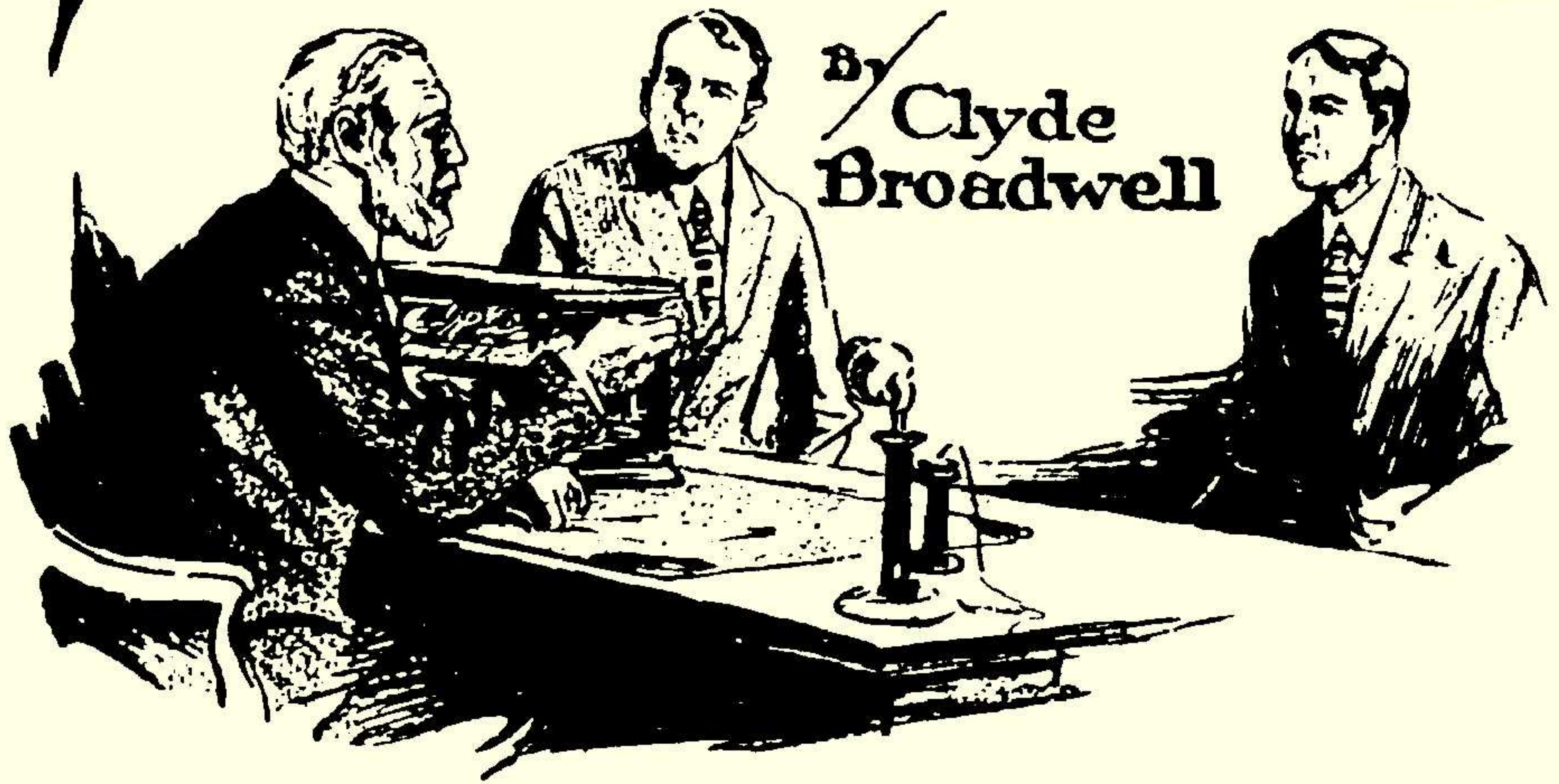
She was still talking as they left her, but so obviously to herself that they felt guilty of no discourtesy. Following Sergeant Fifty-three, they were led to a place at one side of the roped-off inclosure. No one else was there, save a slim, graceful boy of about nineteen or twenty. This was the Numbers' candidate for Musical Director. He was plainly, though not shabbily dressed, and his face was of such unusual beauty that Viola was really startled. As she said afterward, that face was the first thing she had seen in the city which reminded her that somewhere still there really was a Heaven.

TO BE CONTINUED.



Tales of the Double Man

By
Clyde
Broadwell



V.—The Itching Link of Destiny

Being an addition to the remarkable thesis of Doctor Mordaunt P. Dale, eminent psychological expert and fellow of the International Academy of Scientific and Supernatural Research, heretofore published in THE THRILL BOOK. Doctor Dale wishes it understood that this addition to his thesis is the result of collaboration with Doctor Lucien Treboux, who, in Cape Town, British South Africa, lent his renowned scientific skill to the study of "The Double Man" and his mystic transcontinental metempsychosis. Mr. Broadwell, as heretofore, has "translated" the scientific terms into simpler English for THE THRILL BOOK.—EDITOR.

THE "Double Man" is double no more!

Science has discovered and destroyed the mysterious link which made one entity of William Gray, stock-broker in New York, and Arthur Wadleigh, representative of the London Ivory Company, in Cape Town, British South Africa, eight thousand miles apart.

Mr. Wadleigh, pronounced dead and placed in a vault, was revived by the animating influence of Mr. Gray's soul. He was married to Miss Elaine Brandon in Cape Town and went on a honeymoon trip to Natal. Mr. Gray remained in Cape Town, so as to be in the same day and night intervals as Mr. Wadleigh, lest otherwise their weird inter-transmigrations recommence, should one fall asleep and the other remain awake in different periods of the day,

as had been the case when they were eight thousand miles apart.

Mr. Wadleigh and his bride returned to Cape Town. Mrs. Wadleigh met Mr. Gray, the man she would have wed had not Wadleigh risen from his tomb on the day set for the bridal. She was told that Mr. Gray had entered into the plan to marry her solely for the purpose of saving her reason, which had been shattered by Mr. Wadleigh's death. She graciously thanked Mr. Gray.

I, Doctor Mordaunt P. Dale, was present at their meeting, as also were Doctors Lucien Treboux, Marvin Porter, and Philip Spaulding. I shall pass over the resultant embarrassment suffered by both Mrs. Wadleigh and Mr. Gray. Each realized that they had been mere pawns in a great game or destiny.

I knew, though, that Mr. Gray actually had loved Mrs. Wadleigh as Elaine Brandon and had yearned for her both when animating Wadleigh's body with his soul and when, as actually himself but posing as Wadleigh, he had kissed her the day before she married Wadleigh. But Mr. Gray most honorably has put aside this affection and a warmly sincere friendship exists between the Wadleighs and Mr. Gray.

For the sake of sweet Erla Kingsley, who had been Mr. Gray's fiancée before his mental breakdown and who, I know loves him, I hope that Mr. Gray and Erla will resume their old affection which was blighted by the dread link of destiny.

And now, this unacademic diversion from my more serious narrative ended, permit me to discuss briefly the discovery by science of the solution to the strangest occult-physical phenomenon with which it ever has been confronted.

I am not prepared to say whether or not Mr. Wadleigh's entering the married estate had aught to do with the developments which caused the solution of the problem. But Dr. Treboux, the eminent French psychic expert, and myself are agreed that it might have had some bearing on the case.

Being absolutely identical in every respect, perfect replicas of each other, it was and still is impossible to differentiate physically, mentally, or vocally between Messrs. Wadleigh and Gray. In order that science might not become confused while studying their metempsychosis, Mr. Gray wore tan shoes and Mr. Wadleigh white pumps. Thus only could I and others distinguish which man was which.

This may appear absurd in the telling, but it is the truth. Both men had large wardrobes and made frequent changes in attire, so that the shoe method seemed as good as any other. Both men dreaded to court notoriety by adopting any emblem or any plan which

might make them conspicuous. Their intimates were informed of the arrangement. Other persons did not matter.

So that whenever we saw one entity of "The Double Man" wearing tan shoes, we knew he was Gray, and wearing white pumps, Mr. Wadleigh.

Matters did not come to a climax, however, until Mr. Gray by reason of a tremendous slump in the market which imperiled his fortune, and by the additional reason that his trusted chief clerk who had been left in charge of Mr. Gray's New York offices had been caught in big defalcations, was compelled to return to America to protect his interests and to prosecute the faithless clerk.

Immediately he had crossed the Pacific and arrived in New York, the change in time placed him in the night-time period when it was daylight in Cape Town, and vice versa.

As a consequence, the uncanny inter-transmigrations between Gray and Wadleigh were resumed and every time Gray in New York fell asleep he would awaken simultaneously in Cape Town, animating the body of Wadleigh, and when Wadleigh in Cape Town fell asleep he would awaken simultaneously in New York animating the body of Gray.

It was very embarrassing to all three persons involved, especially to Mrs. Wadleigh, as can be imagined. Mr. Gray, on each such occasion, scrupulously would tell her that he was animating her husband's body, so that she might know. It must have been quite distracting to the poor lady. But it is not my purpose to dwell upon her emotions. I must stick to my last, as a shoemaker might say, and discuss the metempsychosis of the two men involved only.

These renewed inter-transmigrations were accompanied now by a new factor. I had gone with Mr. Gray to New York

and Doctor Treboux, as before, remained in Cape Town to study Mr. Wadleigh's symptoms. Both men described minutely to us their every sensation bearing upon the mystic malady with which they were afflicted.

As on previous occasions when Gray and Wadleigh were separated by distance, Doctor Treboux and I communicated by cable with each other whenever any new developments of importance were remarked.

Consequently, when Mr. Gray described his new sensations, I cabled as follows:

NEW YORK, June 1, 1919.

DOCTOR LUCIEN TREBAUX, Cape Town.

Mr. Gray complains of an *itching* sensation *inside* his head immediately he awakens after an intertransmigration. As nearly as he can tell me, the itch is located just in front of the upper apex of the spinal column and is absolutely *internal*. This is almost beyond belief. I could understand an ache or a pain *inside* his head, but not an *itch*.

DOCTOR MORDAUNT P. DALE.

Even as I transmitted this cablegram, one arrived from Doctor Treboux, as follows:

CAPE TOWN, June 2, 1919.

DOCTOR MORDAUNT P. DALE, New York City.

Mr. Wadleigh tells me that he has an *itch* *inside* his head at a point just in front of the upper terminus of his spinal vertebræ. He insists it is an itch and not a pain. This symptom is one heretofore unheard of in medical annals. It seems to me it would be well to investigate. I shall cable if anything new develops.

(Signed) DOCTOR LUCIEN TREBAUX.

I pored over this wonderful duplication of symptoms in two men eight thousand miles apart. Doctor Treboux's cablegram was dated June 2, and reached me June 1, but this was merely on account of the difference in time at such an antipodal distance. I wondered if it were possible that we were on the trail of the mystic link.

Mr. Gray's business affairs were in such muddled condition that it would be months before he could return to Cape Town. To study this phenomenon

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at such long-distance range were an herculean task. Besides, New York's equipment for research was far and away superior to Cape Town's. Incidentally, it was actual cruelty to have these unfortunate men undergo the same sufferings again. Both had been saved from insanity and one from the grave. A recurrence doubtless would prove fatal to both.

So I cabled to Doctor Treboux asking him to prevail upon Mr. and Mrs. Wadleigh to come to New York at the expense of the International Academy of Scientific and Supernatural Research, of which I had become president as well as fellow. Back came Doctor Treboux's cablegram reply announcing that he and the Wadleighs were leaving Cape Town for New York.

In the interval, Mr. Gray's periods of inter-transmigrations with Wadleigh gradually became shorter and shorter in duration. We actually could gauge the progress New Yorkward of the Wadleighs and Doctor Treboux by this peculiar phenomenon. Never before in history had so *outré* a "speedometer" been known!

Finally, as Mr. Wadleigh entered the same day and night zone in which Mr. Gray lived, their mutual metempsychosis ended. We knew then that the Wadleighs and Doctor Treboux soon would be in New York. And so it transpired.

Now that the two men again were in immediate proximity, Doctor Treboux and I decided to investigate the peculiar internal head itch of which both entities of "The Double Man" had complained.

The outer surface of the rear neck epidermis or skin revealed no strange excrescences, nor were there any abnormalities discernible either in resiliency, lumps, or otherwise.

We were at loss until Doctor Marvin Porter, who returned to New York one week later, chanced upon a happy sug-

gestion which might have occurred to us later, but the credit for which is his. And let me say right here that Doctor Porter, although a young practitioner, has a brilliant future ahead.

I feel that I owe a similar tribute also to Doctor Philip Spaulding, of Cape Town, Mr. Wadleigh's personal physician. Doctor Treboux joins me in my encomiums for both men.

Doctor Porter's suggestion was so patently simple that I marvel Doctor Treboux and myself had not thought of it. But it is ever thus. We overlook the most self-evident helps at solution when tackling great problems.

"Let us X-ray their heads!" was the suggestion of Doctor Porter.

Like a flash it dawned upon us that here was the proper step toward the solution. We consulted Messrs. Gray and Wadleigh. Both were very amiable about submitting to the Roentgen ray examination. We took many X-ray photographs of each man's head. Each photograph had been focused from a different angle. We realized that a most serious, dangerous, and epoch-making operation impended, and we did not wish to make a single misstep—the slightest fraction of a slip of the knife—when performing it.

The most expert operator procurable developed the pictures and made careful enlargements by a new process which precluded the possibility of the slightest variation from actual scale. The result was, every picture, from every angle, was a perfect delineation of the region into which we must cut.

Then Doctor Treboux and myself most carefully examined the photographs, paying especial attention to the region near the upper apex of the spinal column as well as to the vertebræ themselves. Not until we procured the most powerful microscope manufactured, however, could we discover any abnormal conditions. Then we stood dumfounded before our discovery.

For the brain of each entity of "The Double Man" virtually was a living example of a wireless station!

Scoff, if you will. Only a few months ago—in March of this year, in fact—science evolved the wireless telephone across the Atlantic between America and Ireland, twenty-five hundred miles! If the mere human voice vibrations could be carried this distance, why scoff at the far more powerful vibrations of two human souls in perfect attune, the essence of the divine in human body? But I refuse to argue.

The facts are indisputable. Doctor Treboux, Doctor Porter, and Doctor Spaulding have taken affidavits with me to the truth of our weird discovery and our ultimate joint diagnosis.

From the apex of each man's vertebræ extended in upward slanting direction the finest needlepoint of bone I ever have seen. Compared to its delicacy and potential powers the wireless methods used by the human race were crude almost to experimentation.

The extremity of each needlepoint of bone was rather blunt, like the head of a pin, although on an infinitesimally smaller scale. This blunt extremity pressed against a tiny nerve of the brain in each man's head, causing what Doctor Treboux and myself, by virtue of the right of discovery, have decided to call "duoditis."

The nerve vibrations from each man's brain, exactly as the vibrations from a wireless point to another wireless point in perfect attune with each other, caused the inter-transmigration of souls.

For instance, if one man slept and the other remained awake, the pressure on the sleeping man's brain relaxed and that on the waking man's brain increased. This relaxation process set into play vibrations which had the opposite effect on the other man, causing him to awaken simultaneously with the beginning of the other's sleep.

At times, as stated in a previous tale

of "The Double Man," the souls did not inter-transmigrate. Each man, though always awakened by the process of mental or soul wirelessness, continued to be actually himself. I can only surmise that these periods of lapse were occasioned by some defect, like exhaustion, preventing the full power of transmission to be exerted by the bone needles.

Doctor Treboux and myself agree that in the relaxing process, the animating influence, being relieved, fled the body of the tired man to enter the body of the man who had rested and could stand strain after sleep. The latter's own animating influence, seeking to animate the other entity about to sleep, would be overcome by the relaxation process of that other person, become less potent, and remain dormant in the body of the sleeper until his own actual ego reversed the process by falling into his individual stage of slumber.

This explanation is as clear as it can be made. If it be beyond the understanding of the mere lay mind, let this be remembered: science was baffled for months, and that after the deepest possible research. So there is no reason for the layman to consider himself unintelligent or obtuse for not understanding in a few minutes of reading what it required science many, many weeks to unfathom and then to succeed by merest chance only.

Should another case of actual double entity or "duoditis" ever present itself science will do as Doctor Treboux and myself did, viz. operate.

The main question was, should both men go to the operating table, or would an operation upon one man suffice?

Doctor Treboux and I were satisfied that the inter-transmigrations of the two men's souls would cease if one only of the mysterious needles of bone were cut away. But we also considered it best to operate upon both men, if they were willing.

We put the question fairly up to Messrs. Gray and Wadleigh to answer for themselves. At first they opined one operation would be sufficient.

They were very brave about it, and exceedingly chivalrous. Gray wished to undergo the operation alone, because he was a single man and wealthy, while Mr. Wadleigh was married and dependent upon a small income from his father's estate and the salary he was paid by the London Ivory Company.

But Mr. Wadleigh was equally insistent that his should be the duty of undergoing the cutting. Indeed, Mrs. Wadleigh, dearly as she loved her husband, also added her plea to this.

"You know, Mr. Gray," she told the broker, "it was your soul which animated my husband and brought him back to me from the tomb. He owes you his life, just as, conditions reversed, you would have owed your life to him. If the operation is a success, we all shall be happy. Besides"—she blushed prettily—"if Arthur and I should have any children, we would not wish to have them inherit their father's strange malady."

This argument nearly floored Gray, but it also aroused in him a train of thought which he discussed with Mr. Wadleigh.

"Wadleigh," he said, "I guess we'd do the best thing possible by both undergoing the operation. Your wife told me that she feared your children might inherit your malady. Suppose I marry. Suppose I have children. They likewise might inherit my malady. Then your children and my children possibly would become subject to our experiences in metempsychosis—which God forbid! We owe it to the world and to them to end this weird travesty on natural laws."

"You're right, Gray," Wadleigh agreed. "Don't you think so?" he asked, turning to me, who had listened as they argued.

"I think you have both made the proper decision," I replied. "While the inter-transmigrations might stop if but one bone were removed, there always is the possibility that the children of both you gentlemen might inherit your malady, because it combines physical, mental, and spiritual features. If it were merely a physical trait, I would say one operation were sufficient. Or, if naught but a mental or a spiritual peculiarity alone, one operation were enough. But the three conditions combined——" My pause was far more eloquent than words.

Doctor Treboux, when consulted, likewise told the two men he had decided the best course was to operate upon both. It was such an exceedingly dangerous and delicate process that Doctor Treboux and I first caused Messrs. Wadleigh and Gray each to sign a waiver relieving us of responsibility in case they, or either of them, should die.

Mr. Gray drew his will, bequeathing half his estate, valued at five millions of dollars, to his widowed mother; one million five hundred thousand dollars to Erla Kingsley, his former fiancée; five hundred thousand to Mr. and Mrs. Wadleigh, or Mrs. Wadleigh, in case Mr. Wadleigh succumbed, and five hundred thousand dollars to the International Academy of Scientific and Supernatural Research.

Doctor Treboux and myself were appointed executors and we signed the instrument as witnesses. This detail attended to, and his affairs being placed in temporary charge of a banking trust company as guardian, Mr. Gray announced himself ready for the operation.

First, however, he wrote a long letter to Miss Erla Kingsley, the contents of which I did not learn, as he conditioned me to destroy it in the event of his recovery, which needless to say, I have done.

Mr. Wadleigh's will left his small interests to his wife, to whom he bade an affectionate adieu, as the requirements of the operation necessitated his and Mr. Gray's isolation for rest and preparation for the tremendous ordeal ahead.

It was necessary to place them for two weeks on a special diet and to prevent them from undergoing any excitement of a physical or mental nature. The barest amount of exercise was permitted them.

They obeyed to the letter, and I must say that never did two men go more cheerfully to what promised to be doom rather than recovery. I cannot refrain from making this comment in justice to their fortitude and courage.

The operation necessitated as a first step the trepanning of each man's skull. Then the delicate tissues of the brain had to be pierced and laid open with the utmost of ultra-caution, if I may use this expression by way of emphasizing the extreme care with which such an operation must be attended.

Nor were Doctor Treboux and myself willing to operate before personally preparing for the ordeal. We realized that our nerves must be prepared for the tremendous strain soon to be undergone. So, like Wadleigh and Gray, we isolated ourselves and merely emerged from seclusion to make physical and nervous examinations of our two patients.

Finally, everything having been done that science demanded, we conveyed the men to the operating room. The etherizing proved a perfect success, as also the trepanning.

I shall pass over the details of the operation which can be found in a much more lengthy and succinct report which I have had printed and placed in the archives of the International Academy of Scientific and Supernatural Research. Suffice it to say that in each

case we managed to remove the "needle of inter-transmigration," as Doctor Porter aptly described the minute piece of bone.

Both men rallied wonderfully after the first great physical and nervous shock resulting from the operation. They recovered rapidly and now are entirely freed from the dread "duoditis."

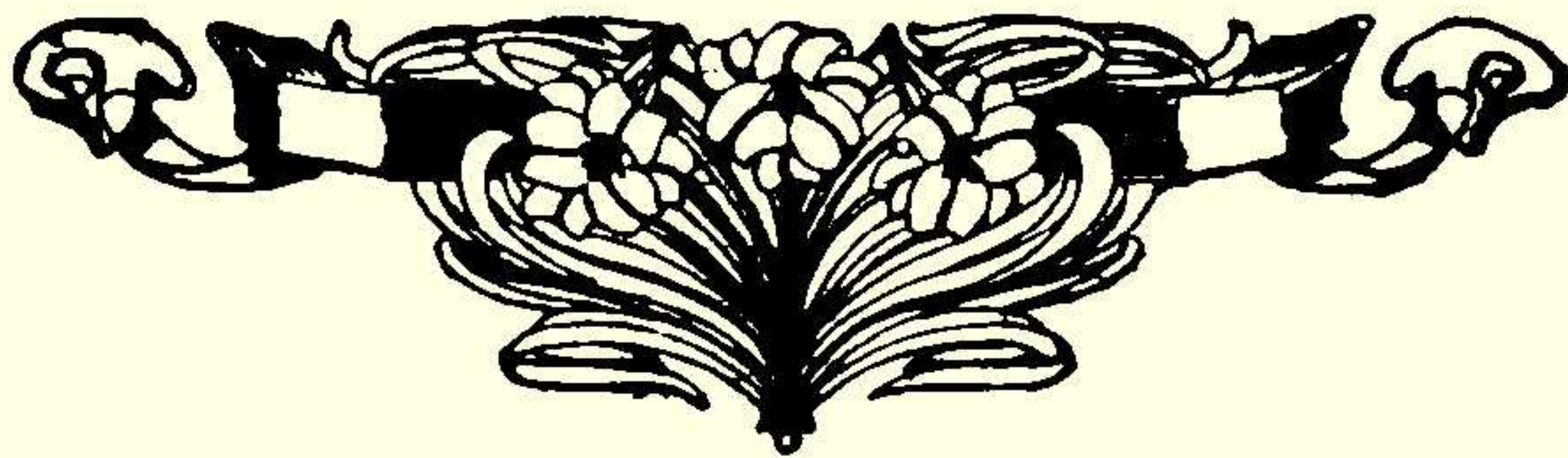
After being royally entertained by Mr. Gray in New York, Mr. Wadleigh and his bride returned to Cape Town. Mr. Gray remained in New York. Both the Wadleighs and Mr. Gray are happy—and small wonder!

The tiny "human wireless bones" are in possession of the International Academy of Scientific and Supernatural Research, which financed the investigation.

I am happy to record that Mr. Gray and Miss Erla Kingsley have arrived at a mutual understanding and that their wedding date has been set for January 10, 1920. Fate having done its utmost to separate them, science has intervened most happily and made joy possible for two persons who never should have been entangled in the meshes of such a mystery.

But one thing more remains to be chronicled in the marvelous experiences of "The Double Man," and it is so unique that even I am startled.

It will be remembered that the hair of both men began to turn gray. Since the itching link of destiny was removed, the hair of Messrs. Wadleigh and Gray is returning slowly but surely to its natural brown color!



TO SPEND WITH EASE

By Charles Kiprooy

TO hear your voice was like a distant sphere's
 Soft echo past the outer rims of day
 And all I had to tell you died away
 Amid the music which had filled my ears.
 Now every shadow near my spirit clears.
 This heart that life had molded out of clay
 Is like an instrument on which you play
 The greatest songs of all the changing years.

Then let us both remember that we dared
 To live what we had dreamed, to spend with ease
 Our hopes and fears and know that we have spared
 No hoarded wealth that Love might wish to seize,
 Believing that the ones who bravely bared
 Their secrets quicken all the mysteries.



The Silver Menace

Murray Leinster

SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS.

Alexander Morrison, a millionaire steamship magnate, with his daughter Nita, is on board his steam yacht, the *Mariposa*, crossing the Atlantic from Europe. Suddenly the propellers of the yacht seem to be turning against an immense invisible force which slows down the yacht's progress till it stops completely. Gradually this force reveals itself as a swiftly growing tide of a silvery, heavy substance. In alarm the master of the yacht sends out wireless calls for help. Lieutenant Commander Davis of the Naval Aviation Corps responds with a powerful plane, manned by himself and a staff of his men. They take on board the plane Mr. Morrison and Nita, leaving the crew on the yacht to perish miserably in the silver menace that has now grown to gigantic proportions. The travelers return safely to New York City, and for a while the Silver Menace is regarded by the world in general as merely a harmless and inexplicable phenomena. Davis and his friend Gerrod are analyzing particles of the Silver Menace which they have brought back with them and discover that the substance is composed of tiny animate bodies known to scientists as animalcules. The menace grows in volume, at last filling the entire Atlantic, and begins to overrun the coasts of the continents, as if bent on obliterating the entire world. Whole countries stand aghast at this horrible force. Nothing known to man is available to combat or overcome it. But when affairs have reached the depth of desperation, Gerrod and Davis discover a scientific means to which they believe it possible to save the world from impending destruction by the Silver Menace.

CHAPTER V.

GERROD watched Davis walking hastily down to the little summerhouse, and laughed.

"Evelyn," he said, still chuckling, "you have truly the wisdom of the serpent and the gentleness of the dove. Davis falls in love with Nita. Nita's father forbids Davis the house, and then you resurrect a college friendship and invite Nita down here so their little romance can be completed. Why are women so willing to go to so much trouble for mere men?"

Evelyn slipped her arm in her husband's, and smiled up at him.

"Well-l-l," she said in mock hesitation, "perhaps this time it was because Davis is so handsome I wanted to keep

out of the temptation of falling in love with him myself."

Gerrod looked after Davis. He had vanished inside the little vine-covered summerhouse, where Nita was waiting. Evelyn lifted her lips invitingly, and Gerrod responded to the invitation instantly. Both of them laughed together.

"As a husband of some six months' standing," said Gerrod with severity, "I protest against this undignified conduct you encourage me to continue."

Evelyn rubbed her cheek against his. "We really ought to be getting back to work on those silly animals," she said reluctantly. "It's beginning to look rather serious. It may be just panic, though."

"Don't believe it." Gerrod was in earnest. "They've covered all the beaches with their sticky slime, and they're creeping inland. The rivers are choked with them, and floods are already threatening to become destructive."

"But it's so silly!" protested Evelyn. "Just because some little animalcule decides to multiply and keep on multiplying——"

"We have to get to work," finished Gerrod. "Come on into the laboratory."

They went into their workshop arm in arm. Evelyn and her husband worked together upon the problems in which they were interested, and indeed Evelyn was nearly as capable a physicist as was Gerrod. Her suggestions had helped him immensely when he and Davis battled with the cold bombs Varhus had used in his attempt to bring the whole earth under his sway. Now they were laboring together to try to find a means of combating the silver menace that threatened the world.

"You're sure there's no exaggeration in the fear that the silver animals will actually grow up on solid ground?" asked Evelyn as she slipped into the long white apron that covered her from head to foot.

"Not much chance," said Gerrod, shaking his head. "I went down to Davis' aviation station last week. They've had to abandon the hangars nearest the water. The slimy stuff has covered the whole beach and is still creeping up. The smell is over everything, and the animals grow and grow. They've reached one of the buildings and crawled up the sides. They plastered the walls with a thick coating and even covered the roof. Height doesn't seem to bother them. They'll creep up a straight wall, and nothing seems to stop them."

"Well, they don't grow very fast,"

said Evelyn slowly. "There's still a lot of time left to fight them in."

"Don't believe it. They covered the Atlantic in three months. How long will they take to cover the continent?"

"You make me shiver," protested Evelyn.

"I'm doing a little shivering myself," said Gerrod grimly. "Every river in the United States is choked up with them, and they grow upstream without the least difficulty. They're creeping up the banks of the streams just as they creep over the beaches. The banks of the Hudson are a mass of silvery slime that's still expanding."

Evelyn began to look a trifle worried.

"But how far can they go from the rivers—from water?"

"They have gone three miles inland," said Gerrod grimly, "along the Carolina coast, where the shore slopes down gently to the sea. Up in Maine there are places where they have only covered a quarter of a mile. In both places, though, they are still creeping inland."

He picked up one of the test tubes.

"Something must be done to stop them. How does the cauterizing seem to work?"

"Not at all; it doesn't even make them pause."

Since their discovery that the jelly formation was caused by the tiny animalcules fusing themselves into one organism, Gerrod had thought of searing the edge of the silvery mass with a hot flame. The heat had baked and killed the animalcules for a distance of some two or three inches into the mass, and he had hoped that by that means their growth might be stopped. They had simply absorbed the seared portion into themselves as food, however, and grown on outward as before. Their means of reproduction made such a proceeding perfectly possible. Under favorable conditions of moisture and food, each of the animalcules multiplied

itself by as many times as the number of tentacles it possessed. The animals themselves were tiny, jellylike creatures incased in a spherical, silicious shell from dozens of holes in which fat, restless tentacles protruded. Normally the tentacles provided the microscopic creature with the means of securing its food. Gerrod had discovered now that it was by those tentacles that they reproduced. One of the tentacles began to swell and grow a round spot at the tip. A shimmering, silvery shell appeared around the swollen portion. Within an hour from the appearance of the shimmer that showed that the protecting shell had been formed tiny, fat, jellylike tentacles protruded themselves from openings in the newly formed shell. With almost incredible rapidity the creature grew to the size of its single parent. Then the connecting tentacles snapped and a new silvery animalcule prepared to reproduce in its turn.

"And Davis is just as oblivious of the Silver Menace as if it did not exist," remarked Gerrod suddenly some time later, apropos of nothing.

Evelyn smiled indulgently and did not answer. She was trying to find if it were not possible that upon exhaustion of the food supply the animalcules would attack each other and so destroy themselves. She had sealed up small quantities of the evil-smelling jelly in test tubes where they could not possibly find fresh supplies of food. When the available nourishment was exhausted, however, they simply joined their tentacles and remained absolutely at rest, their tiny forms immobile. They did not starve, because they were using up no energy in movement. She had kept some of them for over a week in just this state of inactivity, but on being supplied with fresh water they resumed their interrupted multiplication with feverish energy.

On the beaches the slimy, silvery

menace lay in absolute repose. No tremor of waves disturbed its placidity. The whole sea as far as the eye could reach was a mass of utterly quiet silver, reflecting perfectly the cloudless sky. Only at the edges of the mass was any movement visible, and that movement was a slow but inexorably sure creeping inland. Whole colonies of houses were garbed in the glistening, shining horror, and the jellylike stuff filled the roads between. And over all hung the foul, musklike odor as of slime dredged up from the bottom of the ocean.

The sun shone down perpetually from a clear blue sky now. Its fierce heat had dried out the upper surface of the silver sea into a shining mass like glistening parchment, and the breezes that blew were hot and dry. There was no longer evaporation from the sea, and the winds that blew to the shore from the ocean were like blasts from an arid desert. At night, too, the ocean no longer exerted its former function of moderator of the climate. The sun's heat was no longer absorbed by the water by day, to be given up to the breezes again at night. The winds of the ocean by day were hot, dry, foul-smelling blasts, and at night were chill and penetrating. Already the crops—which threatened to be the last ever garnered on the planet—were failing from lack of rain, and there was no relief in sight. It looked as if that part of the population which was not overwhelmed by the slimy masses of the Silver Menace would face death by starvation. Some few enterprising farmers had gone to the shore and filled wagons with the horrible jelly to spread on their farms as fertilizer. The whole world knew that the Silver Menace was simply a mass of microscopic animals, and the farmers thought they would provide their plants with animal humus by plowing the glistening stuff underground.

They soon learned their mistake.

What little moisture remained in the earth was absorbed by the greedy animalcules, who multiplied exceedingly. The farmers learned of their error when they tried to cross their fields. The ground had become spongy and exuded quantities of the Silver Menace at every pore. The crops were covered with a glistening film of the horrible, sticky stuff, which weighted down and finally buried the green plants under its shining masses.

The mantle of shining horror flowed inland, always inland. It rose in thick sheets from the now solidified rivers and crept up the banks, overwhelming everything that came in its way. It clambered up tall trees, and then dripped down in long, thick ropes from their branches. Formless things, shining of silver, showed where forests had come in its way. Gangs of men were working desperately on the docks of New York, shoveling the ever-climbing masses of slimy mess back into the Hudson. Already the drains of the city were solid masses of evil-smelling liquid, and the gutters were choked with their effort to relieve the streets of the trash that was being deposited upon them. The hydrants were flushing the streets regularly now, and the fire and water departments were growing gray in their efforts to keep any fragment of silvery stuff from reaching the water-supply pipes. If that occurred the city would be helpless. As it was, the authorities were beginning to realize that they could not keep up indefinitely the fight against the ever-encroaching horror, and plans were being secretly prepared by which the entire population could be shipped away from the town when the Silver Menace could be fought off no longer.

And all this time, when the government of the greatest city in the world was recognizing the hopelessness of the city's plight and was preparing means to abandon the tall skyscrapers to the

evil-smelling slime that would creep upon all the buildings and fill all the streets with glistening horror; all this time Davis and Nita spent gazing into each other's eyes, oblivious to everything but each other.

The world breathed a sigh of relief when the government announced with a fanfare of trumpets that it had found—not a way of destroying the Silver Menace, but a means of checking it. Tall board fences would be built and covered with lubricants, with greases, and other water-resisting substances. The Silver Menace would creep up to them and be helpless to clamber over them. The world would protect itself by means of dykes a thousand times more extensive than those of Holland. Men set to work frantically to build these defenses against the creeping silver flood. Five hundred miles of fencing was completed within a week, and ten thousand men increased the force of laborers day by day. Men stood behind these bulwarks and watched the slowly approaching silver tide. It crept up to the base of the oily, greasy boarding. It checked a moment.

Then it slowly and inexorably began to climb them. The lubricants were *absorbed as food by the microscopic animals, who flowed over the tall defenses and resumed their slow advance over the whole earth!*

CHAPTER VI.

DAVIS smiled expansively and idiotically as he looked across the dinner table at Nita. Gerrod and Evelyn tried to join in his happiness, but they were both worried over the ever-increasing threat of the Silver Menace. The government's tall dykes had proven useless, and even then there were creeping sheets of the sticky slime expanding over the whole countryside. Davis and Nita, however, were utterly uninterested in such things. They gazed

upon each other and smiled, and smiled. Evelyn looked at them indulgently, but Gerrod began to be faintly irritated at their absorption in each other when the world was threatened with suffocation under a blanket of slimy horror.

"It is indeed wonderful," he said with a quizzical smile, "that you two have decided to marry each other, but has it occurred to either of you that there is quite an important problem confronting the world?"

"Yes," said Davis quite seriously. "Nita's father has to be placated before we can marry."

"Please!" said Gerrod in a vexed tone. "Please stop looking at each other for one instant. I know how it feels. Evelyn and I indulge even at this late date, but for Heaven's sake think of something besides yourselves for a moment."

"Oh, you mean the silver stuff," said Nita casually. "Daddy has offered a huge reward to any one who can fight it successfully. He and half a dozen other steamship men put together and made up a purse. About two millions, I believe."

Davis was looking at her, paying but little attention to what she was saying, simply absorbed in looking. Gerrod saw his expression.

"Don't you *ever* use your head," he demanded. "Here you are worrying about Nita's father, and there you have a reward offered that would clear away all his objections at once."

"Why—why, that's an idea!" said Davis.

"Glad you think so," said Gerrod acridly. "Suppose you two talk things over. You have a brain, Davis, even if you rarely use it."

Davis laughed good-naturedly.

After dinner Evelyn and her husband retired to the laboratory again. Neither of them wanted to waste any time that might be useful in developing a means of fighting the Silver Menace. They

were deep in their work when Davis and Nita rushed in upon them.

"We've got it!" said Davis dramatically.

Nita was clinging to his arm, and looked immensely proud of him.

"What have you?" asked Gerrod practically.

"A way to clear off the Silver Menace," said Davis. "You know the animalcules have very fragile little shells. In the war we had to fight submarines with armored shells. We got the subs with depth bombs dropped near them. The concussion smashed them up. Now let's take bombs and drop them in the silver sea. The concussion will wreck the little shells for miles around."

Gerrod thought the idea over carefully.

"It might turn the trick," he said thoughtfully.

Davis beamed.

"We'll try it at once," he said enthusiastically. "Or, rather, we'll start first thing in the morning. We must have light to experiment by. I'll phone the aviation field at once to have the big plane ready."

"I'm going, too," said Nita determinedly.

"We'll all go," said Davis expansively.

The plane left the ground shortly after daybreak. It was a curious sight to see the absolutely cloudless sunrise. The sky paled to the east, then glowed fiercely red, lightened to orange, and the sun rolled up above the horizon. The big airship circled grandly until it had reached a height of nearly ten thousand feet, then swung for the east and sped away.

Nita sat in the seat beside the pilot, her face flushed with excitement. Gerrod and Evelyn occupied seats farther back, and the single engineer leaned against the rear of the car, where he could keep both ears open to the roar of his engines. The twin bomb racks

along the outside of the car were filled with long, pear-shaped, high-explosive missiles, and the electric releasing switches were close beside Davis' hand. A case of hand grenades was carefully packed in the car, too.

The plane passed over green fields far below, with strangely still and shining streams and rivers winding in and out. From the banks of most of those streams glistening blankets of a silvery texture spread slowly and inexorably over the surrounding fields. Before them they saw what appeared to be the end of the world. Green fields and luxuriantly foliated forests gave place to a field of shining silver, which undulated and clumsily followed the conformation of the land and objects it had overwhelmed. Here one saw ungainly humps that seemed made of burnished metal. The rounded contours told that great trees had succumbed to the viscid mass of animalcules. There was a group of more angular forms with gaping black orifices in their glittering sides told of a village that had been abandoned to the creeping horror. The open windows of the houses yawned black and amazed, though now and then thick stalactites hung pendulously across their openings.

Above all these the big plane sped. It swept on toward the open sea—or what had been the open sea until the Silver Menace had appeared. Soon the shore was left behind, and the huge aeroplane was flying between the two skies—the real sky above and the reflected sky below. Only a thin line from far inland showed dark. All the rest seemed but a universe of air without a horizon or any sign of tangibility. Davis kept his eyes on his instruments, and presently announced:

"I think we're far enough out. We'll drop our first bomb here."

He pressed the release switch as he spoke. The plane lifted a little as the heavy bomb dropped. For a few sec-

onds there was no sound but the roaring of the motors, but then the reverberation of the explosion below reached them.

"Take a look below," said Davis, banking the machine sharply and beginning to swing in a narrow circle.

Gerrod looked down. He saw what seemed to be a ring of yellowish smoke, and a dark-blue spot in the middle of the silvery mass beneath them.

"It did something," he reported. "There's a dark spot on the surface. I can't judge how large it is, though."

Davis released a second bomb, and a third. Gerrod could watch them as they fell. They dwindled from winged, pear-shaped objects to dots. Then there was a flash far below and a spurting of water and spray. In a moment that had subsided, and he saw a second and larger dark-blue spot beside the first.

"I believe you've done it," said Gerrod excitedly. "You've certainly destroyed the silvery appearance. Dare you go lower?"

"Surely," said Davis cheerfully. The plane dived like an arrow, and flattened out barely five hundred feet above the surface.

Gerrod examined the dark spots through glasses. The disturbance had not completely abated, and he could see indubitable waves still radiating from the spot where the bombs had fallen. Davis grinned like a boy when Gerrod told him.

"We'll land in the open space and make sure," he said suddenly, and the plane dived again.

Before Gerrod could protest they were just skimming the surface of the silver sea. The plane settled gently into the now liquid spot of ocean, and Davis shut off the motors. The occupants of the cabin looked eagerly out of the windows. All about them, in a space perhaps sixty or seventy yards across, the water was yellowed and oily, but was certainly water, and not the

horrible, jellylike stuff the world had so much cause to fear. The concussion from the high-explosive bomb had shattered the fragile shells of the silver animalcules, and, with their protection gone, they had relapsed into liquid. At the edge of that space, however, the silver sea began again, as placid and malignant as before.

The plane floated lightly on the surface while the little party congratulated itself.

"It works," said Davis proudly. Nita squeezed his hand ecstatically.

"I knew he'd think of something," she announced cheerfully.

Evelyn and Gerrod were estimating the area of cleared water with gradually lengthening faces.

"Let's see how much space a hand grenade clears," suggested Evelyn thoughtfully.

Davis opened the case and took out one of the wicked little bombs. He wriggled through a window and out on the massive lower plane of the flying boat. Balancing himself carefully, he flung the grenade some sixty yards into the untouched silver sea. It burst with a cracking detonation and amid a fountain of spume and spray. The four of them eyed the resultant area of clear water.

"How wide do you suppose that is?" asked Gerrod rather depressedly.

"Ten—no, fifteen yards by fifteen."

So excited were they all that they did not notice a phenomenon that began almost instantly. The tiny animalcules that formed the silver sea reproduced rapidly when given merely moisture. Here they had that moisture, and, in addition, the bodies of all their dead comrades to feed upon. The conditions were ideal for nearly instantaneous reproduction. As a result the waves from the high-explosive bombs had hardly subsided when the open space began, almost imperceptibly, to be closed by fresh masses of the Silver

Menace. The open space became covered with a thin film which became thicker—thicker——

"And how much explosive was in that grenade?"

"Two ounces of TNT." Davis began to catch the drift of the questions, and his happy expression was beginning to fade away.

"Two ounces of TNT cleared up roughly a hundred and fifty square yards of silver sea. That's, say, seventy-five square yards to the ounce of high explosive." Evelyn was working rapidly with her pencil. "That works out—five hundred pounds of TNT needed to clear a square mile of the Silver Menace. We have fifteen hundred miles of coast that has been invaded to an average depth of at least five miles."

Gerrod took up the calculations with a dismal face. His pencil moved quickly for a moment or so.

"We'd need over eighteen hundred tons of TNT to clear our coasts," he said dolefully. "That wouldn't touch the silver sea itself or keep it from growing again. It grew inland those five miles in two weeks at most. That's nine hundred tons a week needed to hold our own without attacking the silver sea at all. We'd have to have forty-six thousand tons a year to *hold* it, let alone go after the beasts out here, and in the meantime we'll have no rain, consequently no crops. It's a cheerful outlook."

They had been oblivious of what was happening immediately about the sea-plane.

Nita first saw the danger.

"Look!" she gasped.

They had been too much absorbed in gloomy thoughts to notice their predicament. The open space in which they had landed was now a shining, glittering mass of the Silver Menace. But what Nita pointed to was of more imminent danger. The sticky, horrible

mass was creeping up the float on which the seaplane rode and up the smaller floats at the ends of the wings. Tons of the silver horror had already accumulated upon the under surface of the great planes and weighted down the aëroplane until it was impossible for it to rise in the air. And it continued to creep up and over the body. In a little while the seaplane would be overwhelmed by the viscid, evil-smelling, deadly little animalcules.

CHAPTER VII.

SHINING slime crawled up the small floats at the ends of the lower wing. It crept along the under surface, and then dripped in thick ropes down to the surface below. When contact was established the ropes grew fat and wider, until they were like shining columns from the silver sea to the now heavily weighted plane. The disgusting stuff crept over the edges of the lower plane, and began to spread over its upper surface. Other masses began to creep up the struts that separated the lower plane from the top.

The three men began to work like mad. They tore strips from the roof of the cabin and began feverishly to scrape off and thrust away the insistently advancing enemy. The plane was a large one, however, and no sooner had they scraped clear one portion of the plane than another portion was covered even more thickly than the first. The cabin itself began to be attacked. Its lower portion already glistened like metal, and in a little while the silvery film began to cover the glass of the windows. Nita began to be frightened. Parts of the roof had been torn away to provide the three men—Davis, Gerrod, and the engineer—with the means of fighting the creeping horror. When the slime reached the roof and began to pour down the opening there, the whole cabin would

become a terrible, suffocating tank of the horrible stuff. Evelyn spoke quietly, though with a white face.

“If you start the motors the wind from the propellers may blow the jelly away from the cabin.”

The engineer leaped to one of the propellers and swung his weight upon it. The engine turned sluggishly, and then coughed. A second desperate heave. The motor began to run with a roar. The surface of the slime on which the blast of wind beat shivered, and then reluctantly began to retreat. The second motor burst into bellowing activity. The whole plane began to shiver and tremble from the efforts of the powerful engines to draw it forward, but the jelly in which it was gripped still held it fast. The three men redoubled their efforts, and now some faint result began to show. Hampered by the vibrations which strove to shake it off, the Silver Menace advanced less rapidly. In half an hour the upper surface of the plane was nearly free. There was nearly a solid wall of silver horror connecting its under portion with the jellied ocean below.

Davis came to the cabin window, wiping the sweat from his forehead.

“There’s only one chance,” he shouted above the roar of the engines. “I’ve got to fling hand grenades into the sea just ahead of us. They may clear a way for us to rise.”

Nita silently began to pass him up the small but deadly missiles. Her face was set and utterly pale, but she was rising to the emergency with spirit.

An explosion sounded fifty yards away. Another thirty yards away. A third but twenty yards away, and the plane heaved and leaped from the concussion. The blast of air nearly blew the three men from the wings into the waiting mass of animalcules. A huge volume of ill-smelling spume was cast upon the plane, and by its velocity

washed away a great portion of the Silver Menace that still clung to it. The propellers dragged at the plane, and it suddenly darted forward down the narrow lane of open water cleared by the three explosions. All three of the men were clinging to struts out on the planes and there was no one at the controls, but Nita bravely grasped the joy stick, and as the end of the open water drew rapidly near she jerked it backward with an inward prayer. The plane lifted sluggishly, scraped the top of the silver sea, and rose. With an inexperienced pilot at the wheel, with the three men precariously balanced on the wings, it headed straight for the broadest part of the Atlantic.

The motors roared as the plane continued to rise. Nita was white-faced and frightened, but Davis' life was depending upon her. With an amazing coolness, despite the lump in her throat that threatened to choke her, she swung the steering wheel as she had seen Davis do. The plane turned in a wide half circle and headed for the shore again, still rising. Davis, out on the wing, took a desperate chance. He motioned wildly to Evelyn, who flung wide the side window. Then, diving as in a football game, Davis flung himself for the opening. His hands caught in the frame and he drew himself inside. As he laid his hands on the controls Nita incontinently fainted, but Evelyn was there to attend to her, and Davis sped for home at the topmost speed of which the plane was capable, the other two men still clinging to the struts far out on the wings.

Alexander Morrison, steamship magnate and many times a millionaire, looked helplessly from the window of his library. His daughter, Nita, was visiting Evelyn Gerrod, a college classmate, and there was no one to sympathize with him in his misfortune. He

faced absolute ruin. The whole world faced death, but that did not impress Morrison as much as the absolute financial disaster that had come upon him. His ships, at their docks, were useless and already incrustated with the silvery slime that threatened the whole earth. His whole fortune was invested in those vessels. When the government had thrown up its hands over the problem of checking the invasion of the Silver Menace, far less of clearing the seas again, Morrison had gone hopelessly to his little country home on one of the infrequent islands of the Hudson. It was a high and rocky little island, and his house was built upon the top of its single peak. He could look out upon the now solid Hudson and see miles and miles of the silver, evil-smelling jelly.

A little bridge connected the island with the mainland, to which a well-made, winding road led down. Morrison stared through his closed library window—closed to keep out the slimy, disgusting odor of the Silver Menace—and cursed the microscopic animals that had ruined all commerce and now threatened to destroy humanity. Of all his great fleet but two of the smallest vessels remained afloat. They were high up in northern seas, still unvisited by the jellylike animalcules. Where his tramp steamers and passenger lines had visited nearly every port upon the globe, now two small ships plied between Greenland and the most northern part of the American continent.

The silvery jelly was clambering up the rocky shores of his little island, but beyond cursing it Morrison paid no attention. He was absorbed in his misfortune, utterly preoccupied with the calamity that had overwhelmed him. For two days he moved restlessly about his house, smoking innumerable cigars, eating hardly anything, thinking of nothing but the extent of the disaster to his fortune. He had offered half

a million dollars to whoever developed a successful means of combating the Silver Menace. Other men whose wealth, like his own, was solely invested in ocean transportation had joined him in offering rewards, until now a purse of two and a half millions awaited the successful inventor. Multitudes of freak proposals had been made, the majority of them suggesting that sea gulls be trained to eat the silver animalcules, or that fish be bred in large numbers to consume them. In practice, of course, neither fish or birds would touch the disgusting jelly. The arctic seas were teeming with practically all the fish from the Atlantic Ocean. For once the Eskimos had no difficulty in securing enough to eat. The inhabitants of the seas in which the Silver Menace had appeared, without exception, fled from its sticky masses.

Morrison remained shut up in his house, sunk in despondency and gloom, while the silvery jelly crept up the shores of his little island slowly but surely, higher and higher day by day. His butler came to him with a white face.

"Mr. Morrison, sir," said the butler hesitatingly, "the gardener says, sir, that that there silver stuff is creepin' up higher, sir."

"All right, let it creep!" snapped Morrison angrily.

"But, sir," ventured the butler once more, "it's creepin' up on the bridge."

"Have it shoveled down again," said Morrison irritably. "Don't bother me."

The butler went out of the room, and ten minutes later the two gardeners went down to the bridge with shovels. They scraped and shoveled industriously, and when darkness fell the bridge was clear. But next morning showed the bridge a mass of shining silver, and not only the bridge, but fifty or a hundred yards of the roadway and turf leading up to it. The animalcules had come upon the green grass and

it had been used for food, so that they were multiplying rapidly. The creeping movement of the silvery tide could be distinctly seen. The butler came to Morrison in a panic.

"Oh, Mr. Morrison, sir," he said tremulously, "the bridge is covered again and the horrible stuff is coming up to the house. You can see it move, sir. We'll all be suffocated when it catches us, sir."

Morrison shook his head impatiently. "Don't bother me."

The butler was trembling fitfully.

"Beg pardon, sir, but the men says as they won't stay no longer, and they're going to try to get over the bridge to the mainland, sir."

"Very well, let them."

The butler left the room. Presently Morrison heard an uproar outside. The butler was protesting at the top of his voice against something. Morrison went out to see what was the matter. Even his indifference was penetrated by the sight he saw. The silvery slime had crept up to a point but a hundred yards from the house, and was still slowly advancing. Half a dozen servants were bringing out one of Morrison's cars, and were evidently planning to make a dash in it, despite the efforts of the butler to hold them back. Morrison stepped forward.

"Wait a moment, James," he said quietly. "Let the men have the car, but it would be better for one to make the attempt first. There's no use all risking their lives until we know whether there's a chance of success."

His chauffeur was hastily tuning up a motor cycle.

"I'll make a try, sir," he said grimly. "I'll circle the house once or twice until I get up speed, and then shoot for the bridge. I think I'll make it."

Morrison nodded. The motor cycle caught and began to run. The chauffeur circled the lawn once—twice. His machine was running at a terrific speed.

He came around the third time, swung on the handlebars, and shot straight for the bridge. The silvery slime shot away from his front wheels in twin waves as he cut through the mass. The throttle was wide open and the engine worked manfully. Straight for the bridge he went, plowing through the thick, sticky mass. Then the accumulated volume of jelly before him broke down the impetus of his cycle. In spite of all he could do it slowed down, down. It tottered weakly and fell. The chauffeur leaped from it and plunged forward. He slipped and fell, then struggled to his feet again. Five feet more, ten feet more. He was like an animated statue of burnished metal. Thick ropes of silver clung to him as he struggled forward. No man could keep up such exertions. He labored with almost insane force, but his progress became slower and slower. At last he moved forward no more, but still struggled weakly. Then he toppled gently from his feet. The slime covered him silently and placidly. The watchers gasped. The silver tide grew slowly toward the house.

CHAPTER VIII.

NITA was clinging to Davis' hand as they drove out to the Gerrods' cottage again. Traces of her fright still lingered on her face, and Davis' hand was comforting. Gerrod and Evelyn were silent and discouraged. The only really promising plan for fighting the Silver Menace had proven so ineffectual as to be practically useless. In silence the little motor car wound along the twisting road to the little cottage.

All of them were quiet, even gloomy, as they sat down to lunch. Evelyn tried to talk lightly, but conversation lagged in spite of her efforts. The maid brought in their dishes and removed others without a sound. None of them could eat more than a very little.

When the meal was finished Gerrod and Evelyn went out on the porch to discuss gravely the chances, even now, of producing the explosive needed to hold back the Silver Menace. The almost instantaneous reproduction that had taken place over the cleared area at sea, however, made it evident that nine hundred tons of explosive would be needed, not every week, but every day. All the factories in the country, working at their highest speed, could not supply the quantity necessary.

Davis went into the laboratory and brought out one of the silvery test tubes of animalcules.

"Nita," he said mournfully, "I've fought Germans and come out on top. Gerrod and I fought Varrhus and won out. But these infernal little animals, so small I have to take a microscope to see them, seem to have me beaten."

Nita's soft hand crept up and snuggled inside Davis' larger one.

"No, they haven't, either," she insisted stoutly. "You'll think of something yet."

Davis sighed.

"And it would be so perfect if we could be the ones to find out how to beat them," he said dolefully. "That would satisfy your father, and we'd have nothing else to worry about."

Nita looked up into his solemn face, and, in spite of herself, laughed.

"You're worrying too much," she announced. "We're going to take a vacation and go into the music room and I'm going to play soft music that will take your mind off your troubles."

She led him into the tiny music room of the bungalow, and sat down at the small grand piano there.

"You can turn over the music for me," she said gravely as she made room for him on the seat before the keyboard.

There was no music on the rack of the piano, but neither of them thought of that. Davis set down the test tube he

had brought with him and prepared to listen. Nita quite forgot to play any recognizable melody, too. Davis thoughtlessly took possession of her left hand, so she idly struck chords with her right, while the two of them talked foolishnesses that were very delightful. They spoke in low tones, and their voices were soft. They were having an amazingly pleasant time.

They heard footsteps on the porch, and self-consciously drew apart. Gerrod and Evelyn were coming indoors to go back into the laboratory to work on wearily in hopes of stumbling on something that might have an effect upon the ever-encroaching Silver Menace. Davis hastily picked up the test tube full of animalcules. As he took it in his hands, however, he uttered an exclamation of astonishment. The contents were no longer silvery! The tube was full of water with a faintly yellowish tinge. Davis' jaw dropped.

"People!" he called hastily. "Come here! Something has happened!"

Gerrod and Evelyn appeared in the doorway.

"What's the matter?"

"Something's happened to these little beasts." Davis held out the test tube. "Twenty minutes ago this was full of the silver stuff. I put it down on the sounding board here and now they're smashed up and dead!"

Gerrod looked at the tube intently.

"Where was it?"

Davis showed him. Gerrod put one hand on the spot and struck a chord tentatively. His expression changed from weariness to hope.

"Wait a minute!" he exclaimed, and darted into the laboratory, to return a moment later with half a dozen test tubes full of the sticky animalcules. "We'll put another one there and strike a chord."

He did so. The contents of the test tube remained unchanged. He struck another. Still no change. Then, de-

liberately striking one key after the other, with the eyes of all four of them fixed hopefully on the test tube, he began to go up the keyboard. Note after note was struck, but just as they were about to give up hopes of finding the cause of the first tube's clearing Gerrod struck a key—the *F* above high *C*. The instant the shrill note sounded out the test tube clouded—and was clear! It had lain upon the sounding board of the piano. The vibrations of the piano string had been communicated to it through the sounding board.

"Done!" shouted Davis at the top of his voice.

Nita was speechless.

"Sympathetic vibrations," said Gerrod happily. "If you could hang up one of those microscopic shells and ring it it would ring that note. So, when the vibrations from the piano strike them, they vibrate in sympathy, only the piano vibrations are so strong and the shells so fragile that they rack themselves to bits, and the animals are killed. Whee! Hurray! Hurray!"

He shook hands all around, hardly able to contain his excitement.

"But I say," said Davis anxiously, "will those vibrations travel through water, and can we put a piano overboard?"

Gerrod laughed.

"We'll put a submarine siren overboard," he said excitedly, "and tune it to that note. You can hear a submarine siren for fifteen miles with an under-water telephone. Man, you've done the trick!"

The maid appeared in the doorway.

"Some one on the telephone for Miss Morrison."

Nita reluctantly left the room where the others were chattering excitedly. She went to the telephone and put the receiver to her ear, still unconsciously trying to catch the words of the party in the music room. Almost the first words she heard drove them from her

mind, however. Her father was speaking.

"Nita," he was saying coolly, "this is your father. I'm marooned in the house on the island, and the Silver Menace is climbing up the walls. The windows are blocked. I'm expecting them to break in any minute. When they do I'm done."

"Daddy!" Nita choked, aghast.

"Simmons, the chauffeur, tried to get across the bridge this morning," said her father still more coolly, "and the sticky stuff got him. The room I'm in is dark. The Silver Menace has climbed up to the roof. We've stopped up the chimney so it can't come down to get us, but when the house is completely covered we'll be in an air-tight case that will suffocate us sooner or later. I'm rather hoping the windows will break in before that time. I'd rather die like Simmons this morning."

"But, daddy, daddy, hold on! We'll come to you——"

"It can't be done," her father interrupted crisply. "I called you to say good-bye and to tell you to look after the families of the servants that are fastened up here with me." He paused a moment, and said quietly: "I'm in the library downstairs. I can hear the windows creaking. They may give way at any moment and let the horror into the house. It tried to creep in under the doorsills, but we calked them with the table linen."

"Daddy!" cried Nita agonizedly. "Oh, daddy, try to fight it off just a little while! We've found a way to stop it! We can kill them all!"

"I have about ten minutes more, Nita," said her father gently. "You couldn't get to me. Be a good girl, Nita——" There was a crash. "There go the windows! Good-bye, Nita, good-bye——"

The others heard her cry out, and rushed from the music room to hear her calling, calling desperately for her

father to answer her, calling into a silent phone.

CHAPTER IX.

DAVIS pounded mightily upon the great gate of the half-deserted shipyard. Behind him, Nita was sobbing in spite of her efforts to hold back her tears. Evelyn tried her best to calm Nita, but without real effect. Gerrod had shot the party out at the gate of the shipyard and darted off in the little motor car on some mysterious errand. Davis pounded again wrathfully, using a huge stone to make his blows reverberate through the yard. A workman came slowly toward them.

"Hurry! Hurry!" Nita called tearfully. "Please hurry!"

The workman recognized her through the palings. All of Morrison's employees knew his daughter. The workman broke into a run. The gate swung open.

"Where's Mr. Keeling, the manager?" demanded Nita urgently. "We must see him at once."

The workman pointed, and the three of them hurried as fast as they could walk toward the man he had indicated.

"Mr. Keeling," said Nita desperately. "Father is marooned in our house up the Hudson. He may be dead by now. We've got to get to him!"

"I don't know how——" began the manager helplessly.

"I want a submarine siren," said Davis crisply. "One that can be tuned to different notes. Also the fastest motor boat you have. Give the necessary orders at once."

"But the Silver Menace——" began the manager again.

"Don't stand there talking," barked Davis in a tone that secured instant obedience. "Get the siren and the boat. And hurry! This is life and death!"

Galvanized into action, but still confused, the manager gave the orders.

A fast motor boat that had been hauled ashore and put into a shed when the Silver Menace blocked the river was hauled out. A heavy submarine siren was hastily unfastened from one of the workshops, and Davis drove the workmen to the task of fitting a sling on the boat by which the siren could be lowered over the bow. A heavy crane was run up and the motor boat made fast, in readiness to be lifted overboard. Every one worked with the utmost speed of which they were capable. Davis was not his usual good-natured self now. He drove his workmen mercilessly. Hardly had the last of their preparations been completed when a heavy truck rumbled into the yard. Gerrod had commandeered the truck and worked wonders. A grand piano had been lifted bodily into the big automobile. As the truck stopped he was lifting the lid that protected the keys. An electrician stood by the siren, with the tuning apparatus exposed. Hardly had the engine of the truck been shut off when they were busy tuning the blast of the siren to match the tinkling sound of the piano. It took a heart-breaking long time to get the pitches precisely alike, but then the launch swung high in the air and alighted on the surface of the jelly below. The electrician in the launch pressed the button that would set the siren at work sending out its blast of sound waves through the water.

Those on the bank watched in agonized apprehension. The siren sank into the jellylike mass. No audible sound issued from it, once it was submerged, but when the curious sound waves issued into the water from the giant metal plate that in normal times carried warnings to ships at sea a change was visible in the jelly. Wherever the curious water sound traveled the silvery jelly clouded and abruptly turned to liquid! Almost instantly the space between the two wharves, in

which the launch lay, was free of the horrible stuff. Gerrod shouted excitedly. Davis swore happily. Nita pushed anxiously forward.

"We've got to get to daddy!" she cried desperately. "We mustn't waste a second! Not an instant!"

The four of them piled into the launch. An engineer leaped down and twisted the motor. The fast launch shot forward, the submarine siren at the bow sending out its strange water sound that was inaudible to those on board, but which had such an amazing effect on the microscopic animals that composed the silver sea. As the launch gathered speed and headed up the Hudson a high bow wave spread out on either side. The water on which they rode was yellowed and malodorous, but it was water, and not the silvery slime that had threatened the world. The Silver Menace vanished before the launch as if by magic. When the motor boat approached, with its siren still sounding fiercely, though inaudibly, the jellied surface of the river shivered into yellowed liquid, and the creeping horror on the banks trembled and became a torrent of water that flowed eagerly back into the bed of the stream.

The island on which Morrison had been marooned loomed up ahead, looking like a small mountain of silver. The house at its top was as a monument of shining metal. But as the boat sped toward it the silvery appearance of the coating clouded and melted away. Instead a torrent of evil-smelling water poured down the sloping sides of the island and into the river again!

They found the servants weeping for joy. Morrison, when the windows of the library had broken in under the weight of the mass of the horror outside, had leaped through the door of the library and slammed the door behind him. They had calked the cracks with cloth, and for a moment isolated the Silver Menace in that one room.

As window after window broke in, however, they had been forced to withdraw from room to room, until at last they were huddled together in a tiny linen closet, windowless—and without ventilation. They were waiting there for death when they heard the rushing of water all about them and found the Silver Menace, silver and a menace no longer, flowing down to rejoin the waters from which it had come.

As is the way of women, Nita, having sobbed heartbrokenly for sorrow when she believed her father dead, now sobbed even more heartbrokenly for joy at finding him alive, but she did not neglect, after a reasonable interval, to bring Davis forward.

"You know him, daddy," she said, smiling. "Well, he is the person who found the way to destroy the Silver Menace, and so he's the person you are going to pay that big reward to."

Morrison shook hands with Davis. He knew what was coming next.

"And though it hasn't anything to do with the other things," Nita said proudly, "he's the person I'm going to marry."

"It would be ungracious," observed Morrison, "to disagree with you. Mr. Davis, you are a lucky man."

"I know it," said Davis, laughing in some embarrassment. He looked at Nita, who dimpled at him, and was promptly and frankly kissed for her daring. She did not seem to mind, however. In fact, she dimpled again.

The last vestige of the Silver Menace was turned to yellowed water within a month. Submarine sirens, carefully tuned to precisely the pitch that would cause the tiny shells to shatter themselves, were hastily set aboard huge numbers of fast steamers, that swept the ocean in patrols, clearing the sea as they went. Whenever the clear note was poured out by one of the under-water sirens the silvery animal-

cules died in their myriads. Slowly, as the evil smell of their bodies dissipated, the inhabitants of the Atlantic Ocean came back to their normal haunts. By shoals and schools, by swarms and in tribes, the fishes came down again from the North. A week after the destroying steamers began their patrol rain fell on the Atlantic coast. The abnormally dry air above the ocean took up water avidly and poured it down on the parched earth with a free hand. The ocean, too, took up again its former function of furnishing cool breezes during the day and warm breezes at night. The seashore became once more a place of charm and delight. At least Davis and Nita found it so. Davis was being waited upon with decorations and honorary degrees, with the freedom of cities and medals of honor from learned societies. At each presentation solemn speeches were made in which he was told how superlatively clever he was. Remembering the purely accidental nature of his discovery, he found it difficult to keep from laughing. These things were tiresome, but were not active nuisances until after his marriage. When he found that he and Nita would not be left alone, that no matter how scrupulously they concealed their identity it was sooner or later discovered and they were interviewed and written up in special articles for the newspapers he grew annoyed.

The climax came on a beautifully moonlit night at a seashore resort where they were quite confident they would not be discovered. The beach was like silver, and the waves were dark and mysterious, except where the reflection of the moon glittered on their shining sides. Davis and Nita, forgetting the world and devoutly hoping that they were by the world forgot, sat and looked at the moon and played idly in the sand and told each other the eternal foolishnesses that are probably the

truest wisdom. They were utterly happy just being alone with each other.

A dark figure looked up over and coughed. They started.

"You are Flight Commander and Mrs. Davis?" said a voice deprecatingly.

Davis groaned and admitted it.

"Our little village has learned that you are visiting here, and a banquet has been prepared in the pavilion in your honor. Won't you do us the honor to attend?"

Davis muttered several words under his breath, for which Nita later reprimanded him, and rose heavily.

The banquet was a great success. The freedom of the village was given them both. Speeches were made, in which Davis was told how superlatively clever he was. The band played "See the Conquering Hero Comes." Davis

sat miserably through it all, with Nita scarcely less miserable, by his side.

The next morning he sent a wire to Teddy Gerrod:

Can we come and spend our honeymoon with you? People won't let us alone.

DAVIS,

Within an hour the answer came:

Come along. We'll let you alone. We're having a second honeymoon ourselves.

GERROD.

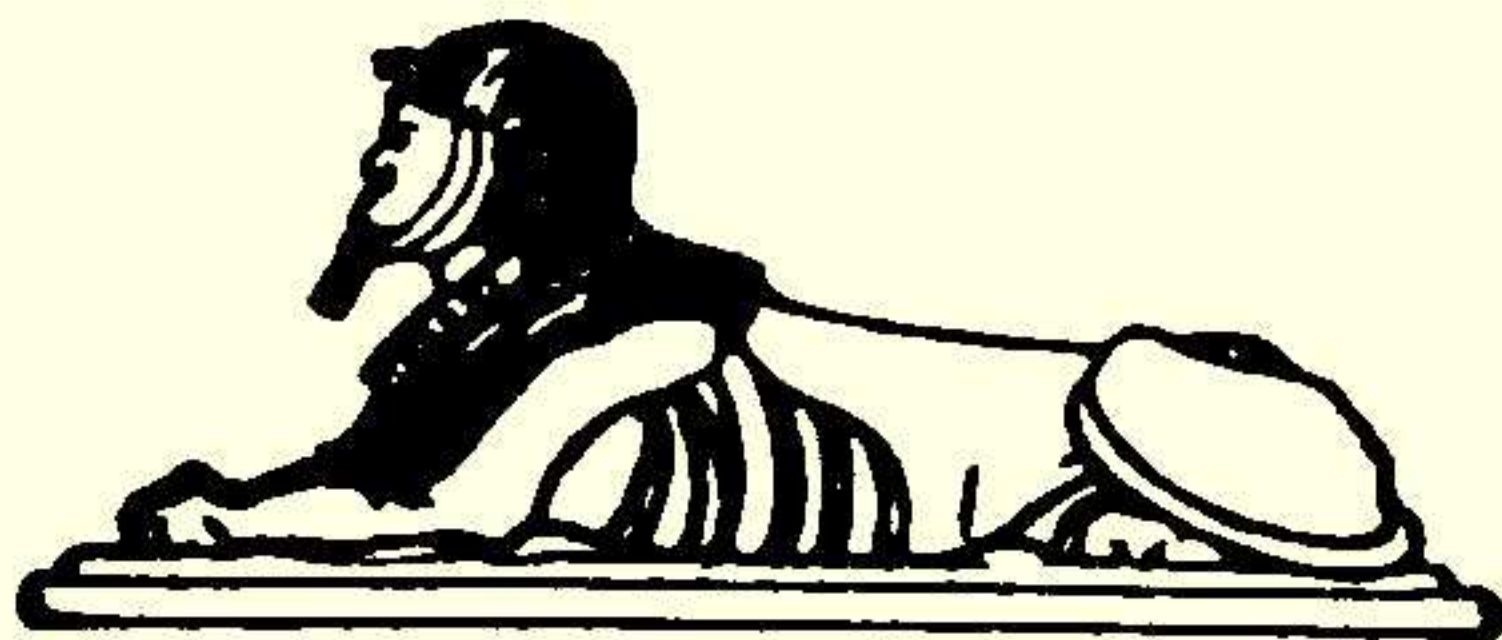
Davis showed the wire to Nita.

"Splendid!" she said with a sigh of relief. Then she dimpled and looked up at Davis. "But, Dicky, dear, we'll never have a second honey honeymoon like they are having."

"We won't?" demanded Davis. "Why not?"

"Because," said Nita, putting her face very close to his. "Because our first one is never going to stop."

THE END.



DISSONANCE

By Clark Ashton Smith

THE harsh, brief sob of broken horns; the sound
 Of hammers, on some echoing sepulcher;
 Lutes in a thunderstorm; a dulcimer
 By sudden drums and clamoring bugles drowned;
 Crackle of pearls, and gritting rubies, ground
 Beneath an iron heel; the heavy whir
 Of battle wheels; a hungry leopard's pur;
 And sigh of swords withdrawing from the wound:

All, all are in thy dreadful fugue, O Life,
 Thy dark, malign, and monstrous music, spun
 In Hades, from a crazy Satan's dream . . .
 Oh, dissonance primeval and supreme—
 The moan, the thunder, evermore at strife,
 Beneath the unheeding silence of the sun!

Filbert's Grand Final

by Bernard
Gilber
Priestley



FILBERT GIDDIPATE came into our young lives through a sort of chair-conversation route. In other words, he was recommended to me by my wife, whose sister informed her that an orchard owner in California had told said spouse's relative that said fruit man had learned from a minor-league scout in Texas that said player finder had been tipped off by a man in Tombstone, Arizona, that one of the last-named person's relatives in Jump-off, Kansas, was a player of big-league caliber.

Far be it from me to make a practice of picking up the performers for the Speed Boys on tips of relatives or their friends, but in this case I gives in to the better half, banking on her intuition to guide me straight. Accordingly, I shoots a telegram to Jumpoff, requesting this alleged phenom to report to our aggregation at Chicago, where we'd open an early August series with the White Sox in five days.

Zowie! I survives the shock of the first sight of him, but the event hands my constitution a fearful biff! I'm sitting in the hotel on the night before

the opening of the White Sox series when in he pops.

He's sporting one of them cutaway coats that was all the nuts twenty years back. Its sleeves covers up all his hands with the exception of his finger tips. Its sides reaches down his short legs to his knees. His trousers is green with age and sticks to his underpinnings so tight you'd think they was clinging vines. His shoes is of the copper-tip variety that was curios when we were urchins. On his bean is a stovepipe kelly. He comes over in front of my chair and bows like he was about to shine the tile floor with his pugilistic nose.

"Mr. Jackson Barrett, manager of the Speed Boys?" he queries. And, when I was sufficiently recovered to be able to nod, continues: "I'm Filbert Giddipate. I beg to acknowledge the receipt of your long-distance communication. I am here."

"Never mind stooping and highbrow lingoing," I says, extending my hand, "because I can't come back at you in either line." When he shakes, I adds: "Glad to know you."

"The pleasure is all mine," he chirps. "I assure you I am your most humble servant."

"Not looking for servants," I declare, "but diamond performers. Let's get down to business."

Come to find out he's gathered all these glad rags at pawnshops since blowing into Chic. And if the keepers of these three-ball establishments only had a few customers like him it's a safe wager they'd soon own homes on the "drives," "ways," and "avenues," and be able to buy newspaper plants to run as hobbies. The outfit, so he confides, has set him back five hundred bucks, which he thinks is a bargain price. The dicer is supposed to have been worn once by a famous statesman, the coat by a noted actor and the trousers by a world-renowned sportsman.

First thing I does is warn him to get some civilized clothes, saying that this rig will set the boys to kidding him so strenuously he'll think that Beelzebub himself has caught onto his coat tails. In the end he promises to get retogged that evening, before the boys has a chance to give him the once over. Having enough of him for the first sitting, I pleads a theater engagement and ducks out of the hotel.

When the Speed Boys arrives at the park the next afternoon the curio bird is among the missing. I'm just beginning to think some automobile or car has slipped him the K. O. when he appears. Snicker! You'd thought they'd fed me a keg of laughing gas. But, at that, I didn't have nothing on my players.

In the first place he has a dinky false mustache stuck onto his upper lip. His pink ball shirt and purple pants are skin-tight and his cap is cut like a porter's. He's wearing leopardlike stockings and a pair of track shoes.

"Can't play ball here with that outfit," I asserts, when I gets back my voice. "Didn't I tell you to get some

of our regular togs from the custodian of supplies?"

"I put on my own uniform," he comes back, "because I am fully convinced I can play better ball in it. I'll have you understand that this is a very valuable uniform. In the secondhand store where I purchased it they informed me the shirt and pants were once worn by Spalding, the father of baseball; the stockings by the famous Lang; the cap by Clarkson, and the shoes by "Pouch" Donovan. Wearing such notable apparel gives one marvelous confidence, especially when he tolerates a mustache as was the prevailing custom in the early days of organized baseball."

"Ever read an official rule book?" I asks.

"Most kind sir," he replies. "I read two pages of one once, but did not like the modern style of writing so broke from the trying ordeal."

This gets my angora. "The rules declares," I thunders, "that when a team is away from home its players must wear dark uniforms all of like color. If you wants to stay with this bunch you got to sport what the rest do. Wouldn't have nothing in the outfit looking like you do now anyway. Think I'm inviting myself to a vacation in a psychopathic hospital?"

After much urging he consents to get into a regulation uniform and appears on the field minus all the antiques except the mustache. I has several of the boys engage his attention while one of them touches a match to this fuzz. Zip! Smoke! No more lip disfigurer. Sore? He'd made chewing gum out of a crowbar if some one stuck it into his mouth. But finally he cools down and goes into practice.

In the next few days he shows me more baseball than any recruit that ever stepped into my stable. I'm so impressed I shoves him into left field in the last game of the Windy City series.

He hits that old apple so hard I expect the cops to take him any minute on the charge of murder. When we figures out what he has done for the day we finds he has made four hits, three runs and two circus catches that saves the game.

I plays Filbert regular in left field for the next two weeks and he becomes known to all the sporting writers as a find. Just when I begins to pass out the credit to my wife's intuition for bringing him among us, more proof that he's some sort of a memento maniac crops out.

We're playing the Tigers in Detroit, the first half of the ninth starting with both teams having a brace of runs to their chedit. The first enemy batter gets on and goes to second on a sacrifice bunt. Up comes Doctor Tyrus Cobb, hitting, base-running, and fielding specialist, and poles a long fly to Giddipate. The runner on second lights on the sack and prepares to dart for third the moment the ball is caught.

Giddipate grabs the pill all right. But does he attempt to throw out the runner at third? Not that bird! He stands there admiring the sphere and tossing it from one hand to the other.

The runner goes to third. The coacher motions him home. About the time he is crossing the home plate, Ben Hurd, our center fielder, steals the ball from Filbert's hands and returns it to the diamond. The next man is retired easily.

When my players comes in, I goes to Giddipate and bawls: "You sap, where's your dome? Gone to seed?"

"I don't see that I did anything not perfectly proper," he returns. "I desired to keep that ball simply for the reason it was hit by Mr. Cobb and I wanted to add it to my collection of keepsakes. What does it matter that by so doing a single run came in? Surely you're not going to criticize me for such a trivial thing?"

After recovering, I goes at him with all the denunciatory words in my repertoire. The boys horns in where I lays off and snarls, growls, and barks until a stranger might have thought they was dogs about to start for a sausage factory.

But we might just as well saved our wind, for Giddipate relents not, even after the game has ended with the tally he presented to the home team proving the deciding run.

That night we beats it to St. Louis for a four-game series. During the trip I chins with Giddipate, warning him he'll get benched if he pulls any more of this souvenir-gathering stuff during the progress of a game.

Before the opening of the contest next day Red Cross campaigners collects funds in the crowd, and little toy balloons, to which posters is attached, are sent into the air from the playing field.

With two out in the opener Giddipate raps a liner to right field that seems labeled for three sacks. As he's approaching second one of the toy balloons drops to a position just over his head. He spies it. The memento bee in his head starts buzzing.

He begins chasing the windbag, being declared out by the ump the moment he runs out of the base line. A gust of wind sends the rubber flyer toward the concrete bleachers in right field. Filbert, deaf to the shouts of the players and the fans, continues after it, jumping high into the air every few yards in an effort to pull it down. The bleachers can't dodge out of his way, so he crashes into them. Down he drops to the ground, the force of the blow causing his upper apartment to become vacated.

They lugs him to a hospital. The game goes on. We lose.

He gets back to earth three days afterward. The first thing he does is ask the attending nurse—Lalla Treator

by name—if he can have a pin he seen in her hair for a keepsake. She humors him, and for several days thereafter lugs him in some small trinket of odd design with each meal. Fed up on this junk, his recovery is rapid and he soon reports on the team.

We're playing in New York on the day he comes back to the fold. Incidentally, September is getting under way and the Naps is pressing us for the lead in the pennant race, so we can't afford to kick away a single game. Since he is just up from his sick bed, I only hammer and tong him fifteen minutes prior to ordering him to get into left field and act like a human being.

Every player and fan on the circuit is wise now we're carrying a memento maniac. This balloon-chasing episode has been advertised in all the big league cities, with the result that Giddipate ranks with the record holders in the Hall of Bone-pulling Fame.

During the practice the fans blats at him something fearful. Is he affected? Yes, but no one would ever imagine how. He pulls a tiny pad and pencil from his pocket each time he hears some unique expression and jolts it down for keepsake purposes.

With the aid of his hitting we gets the jump on the home team. Then, in the last of the eighth, Chunky Herbertson, our flinger, goes on a pass-giving spree, getting through handing out free tickets to first only when I calls him to the showers and sends Tad James to the mound. At this time the score stands four apiece. Though the bases is all occupied and none out, the new flinger, helped by good work on the part of the infielders, retires the side without further tallies.

Filbert singles as an opener for the ninth and steals second as the next batter whiffs the atmosphere for the third strike. Jack Conley places a single into the outfield and Giddipate races to

third. As he rounds the sack and shoots for home, Wise Owl Jolson, the opponent's hot corner performer, throws a glistening piece of metal before the memento maniac's feet and shouts:

"Stop and get it, Filbert! Captain Kidd used that for a safety-razor blade."

Giddipate comes to a standstill, picks up the shiny bit and begins eying it. Before our coacher on third can get him going again the ball is shooting for the infield and he is caught yards away from the tally pan. His bean is hanging down when he gets in to the bench.

"Didn't you promise me you'd chase no more souvenirs while games was going on?" I yells at him. "Where do you get that stuff, you relic-picking hooligan!"

Smiling like a sleeping fat man submitting his nose to being tickled by a fly, he draws out his pad and pencil and writes down "Relic-picking hooligan." Then he exclaims:

"That is a wonderful phrase. I shall certainly cherish it as among the best of my collection, guarding it through the years to come with my very life."

What can you do with a hyena like that? There's just two things—slay him on the spot or walk away. Because we needs him to help win the pennant, I chooses the latter alternative and dashes under the grand stand to pedestrian down my wrath.

We never gets a chance to make another run in that game. On the other hand, the New Yorks bats out the score needed to win in their half of the ninth.

The next three days I seen nothing of Giddipate, having ordered one of the boys to warn him not to come into the range of my peepers, for sometimes even baseball managers runs amuck and indulges in increasing the death rate. So the next time I gets a look at him is during the practice before the first game in a series with the Phillies.

If nerve got him anywhere he'd be

president of this republic for three terms. Up he comes, as the game is starting, carrying in his hand a stick about three feet long and two inches in diameter.

"Mr. Barrett," he chirps up in his canary voice, "I shall make more hits now than ever. See"—he holds up his cudgel—"this is the bat that Willie Keeler used to 'hit 'em where they ain't' with many years ago. A pawnbroker was kind enough to allow me to have it for the meager sum of two hundred dollars."

His words made my arms itch so severely for action I'm forced to shoot for underneath the grand stand and take gymnastic exercises to get them quieted down. While I'm there, though, I seen to it that one of the players stole Giddipate's new pill smasher and turned it over to the grounkeeper, who says it "would make damn good cart wheels for his sonny, when sawed up."

The demon out of me, I returns to the bench, finding that it's now Giddipate's turn to swing the willow and that his failure to find the so-called Keeler cudgel is resulting in his chasing around the dugout like a dog with the rabies. The only way I can get him to go in and hit with another stick is to promise him a raise of two hundred dollars in pay, so he can purchase a new "famous" bat.

This game he plays like the best I ever gazed at in ball togger. The third inning sees him clean the sacks and jog the circuit himself with a home run. And in the eighth he puts the contest on ice with a three-bagger that brings in two runs. The winning of this contest makes us two full games ahead of the Naps, who now looms up as the only trouble between us and a pennant.

Giddipate continues his slashing playing for the next ten days and don't once go off on a memento-collecting jag. This is saying quite some little bit about his good deportment, for in

each game players on the opposing teams baits all kinds of keepsake traps in which to catch him. In Congressville certain gamblers goes even so far as to employ men to dangle souvenirs of all sorts over the side of the left-field bleachers while he is playing near in an effort to entice him from the game.

Three or four days later we learns the reason for all this goody behavior. Seems Lalla Treator, who'd administered to him in the hospital, has convinced him he should take upon himself a living keepsake. She'd seen the writing on the wall and realized that he wouldn't be long for the big leagues unless he grew antisouveniristic while on the diamond, and had assented to boss him for the remainder of his life only if he'd promise not to go on any more memento bats in the playing hours. The rest of the season was to be a trial period, and if he didn't make no breaks they was to be hitched.

With Giddipate's increased help and whirlwind work on the part of the rest, we begins to win games with the regularity that an expert marksman can pick off clay pipes in a shooting gallery. But the Naps stages a spurt, too. They're only one game behind us when they hits our home ball yard for the final four-game series of the season. We was a pretty happy lot, just the same, with Filbert acting like a regular star and only the necessity of breaking even in the series between us and the pennant honors and world series money.

Giddipate wins the first game himself in the last of the tenth inning. Up to that frame both teams hadn't smelled a run. There are two out when he spansks a three-bagger to the outfield fence and kicks the home plate through a wild heave to third by an enemy gardener.

However, Lefty McCoy, the Naps' most dependable pitcher, and the man

who's been our Nemesis all season, lets us down without a run in the second contest, while his teammates, aided by errors, comes through with two tallies. Though this win makes us anxious, we're fully confident that, now the best pitcher is out of the way, we'll cinch the pennant by taking the next game.

But the Naps' general ain't asleep. He sends McCoy back for the third struggle, a most unexpected act. Blast if this gink don't beat us again, three to two, both of our scores being knocked in by Giddipate.

If there was any fans in the city who didn't trolley, auto, or hike out to the native ball pasture for the grand finale they must have been crippled temporarily, detained by law, broke, or tied up for the afternoon by their wives. The stiles chalks up a capacity house long before the starting time. Guess them stands and bleachers weren't filled out with some conglomeration of faces!

I chooses Beanball Donnell, who warms up like a Mathewson, to take the mound for our team. The Naps decides on Big Bill Kent. Finally the serge-suited arbiter yells "Play!" and the big noise of the season is a-going.

The Speed Boys draws nothing but zeros for the first three innings. But the Naps ties our record and also goes out in order in their half of the fourth. Then a fare-ye-well wind blows into our dugout in time to give Giddipate luck enough to clout the sphere for two bases. Ted Joyce bingles out to right garden and Filbert slides home safely, although the play is close. Here the racketing ends abruptly.

From this point on to the first of the seventh nobody'd ever known there was any hitters on either team that had not stepped out of the park for the afternoon. Every one who strolled up to the plate swung like he was a gate on well-oiled hinges. Those that didn't exercise their muscles by slashing the air cracked out the nine-cents-a-bushel

variety of pops, or grounders that the infielders could handle with one mit in their pants' pockets.

Beanball Donnell opens the seventh by presenting a pass to the first batsman. The next whacker dumps down a bunt, suiciding his fellow to second. A fielder's choice brings the runner to third and he tallies on a single, the man who hits it being thrown out at second. But that one run ties the score.

But Henry, our center fielder, starts our half of the same inning by getting to first on a grounder that the opposing shortstop kicks all over the lot. There he remains while the next two batters take the strike-out route.

Up comes Giddipate. In the hole for a brace of strikes, he hooks the apple for a two-base bingle, Henry beating the sphere by a foot to the home plate, and thereby scoring the run that leaves us two to one to the good. The next batter pops up to the pitcher.

The eighth inning doesn't bring enough excitement to wake up the tired business man who's fallen asleep in the front row of the grand stand, directly behind the home plate. Neither team starts nothing that savors of growing into a score. So we begins the ninth fully convinced there'll be a pennant banner floating from our park flag-pole the next year.

Before this inning is a minute old, however, I'm breaking my cud-chewing records. Giddipate begins by dropping an easy fly on which the batter gets to first. Donnell follows by giving the next hitter a base on balls. The third walloper rolls one down the third-base line and Chick Short, misjudging that it's going to bounce foul, leaves the ball hop. Three men on bases!

My spirits goes down to my shoes and passes out of the eyelets. But they begins working their way back when Donnell fans the hitter. The next batter, after cracking out a couple of fouls

dangerously close to the third-base line pops to the catcher. A single out between us and the flag!

The first ball that Donnell serves to the next willower is called a strike. At the instant the batter sets himself for another swing my heart seems to jump up and start cleaning my teeth, for I happens to glance to left field and sees that Giddipate is walking toward the bleachers. Hanging out over them is a man dangling some dark object on a string and beckoning to the memento-maniac.

"Memo gag got him again," I moans and closes my eyes.

There's a sharp crack. I opens my lookers and sees the ball shooting toward left field, going higher and higher in the air with each foot it advances.

Suddenly a pair of arms pulls Giddipate's enticer back into the crowd. Then a female figure mounts the bleach-

ers' wall in the vacated spot and calls to Filbert. Her chatter causes him to stop for an instant, face the home plate and gauge the coming ball. All at once he bolts for it, jumps, and clutches it with his gloved hand, a foot or two inside the foul line. Three out! A pennant won!

That woman was Lalla Treator. She'd figured some one in those bleachers might try to coax Giddipate with a keepsake at the opportune moment to make him lose the game, and she'd decided to be Lalla-on-the-spot. She'd pulled down the memento dangler and shoved him so hard he'd be going yet if it wasn't for the bleachers' floor.

A man who listened in on her shouts says she brought Filbert back to consciousness with:

"Oh, Filly! Filly! Get that ball! It's the best keepsake you could obtain in a thousand years."



THE LOVE THAT STIRS ME SO

By Carl Buxton

YOU came to me laden with gifts, my sweet. . . .

The giving was good, so clean a thing
 That even I found virgin songs to sing
 That were not echoes of some dead defeat.
 Few loves there are that find us armed to meet
 The wasted spirit's roused desiring;
 Vain, vain were all the gifts that you might bring
 Save love with her own hands performed the feat.

Ah! lay your cool white fingers on my face
 That I might touch the love that stirs me so;
 Hand in hand then let us fly through space,
 Look back on earth where people come and go,
 Remembering that we come of that same race
 Yet have created worlds they cannot know.

THRILLING EXPERIENCES

We announced in the September 1st number that the best letter setting forth a thrilling experience, would be awarded a prize of \$10. Since that publication, we have decided upon a fairer way of rewarding the writers of interesting letters. It is as follows:

We will pay the writer of every letter published, at manuscript rates. If we do not publish letters submitted to this department, it means that we do not consider them interesting enough for publication. No letters will be returned. You are advised to keep copies of what you send us.

Four or five hundred words should be the maximum length. The "experience" may be some actual, physical adventure or some wandering exploration in the pallid borderland that separates this life from the realm of the unseen. It must, of course, be bona fide, and must also have some particularly striking quality or psychological significance in order to receive consideration in these columns. Letters will be printed over the writer's name, unless contrary instructions are given.

The Editor THE THRILL BOOK.

MY DEAR SIR: I have been much interested in your excellent magazine, a copy of which has just fallen into my hands. What a good idea is that of the department of thrilling experiences in which you call upon your readers for some account of that which has at one time caused them to undergo a thrill of terror, horror, or surprise. Will one attribute vanity to me if I say that it fell to me to witness with horror a sight which few of your public have been privileged to see? It was not from curiosity, I can assure you, but in my capacity of reporter, that I attended for my newspaper a double execution by the guillotine some years ago at Strasbourg.

Those who suffered the penalty were chief actors in a drama of passion. The woman, Wendel, wife of a merchant, had made the acquaintance of one Wirth, a workman, two years younger than herself, who became her lover. This unworthy pair did not long delay to rid themselves of the husband by poison; suspicion fell upon them, they were arrested and condemned to death.

It was a morning of spring about six o'clock when I was introduced into the courtyard. There were already some people there who shivered in the raw air. All was ready. The guillotine resembling that in use with us, but made in this case entirely of

steel, stood on the right. On the left was a table covered with a black cloth. On it between two candles lay a crucifix. The executioner, a stout, red-faced man in overcoat and silk hat, examined the machine without emotion, speaking in a low voice to his two assistants, veritable pair of Hercules. Suddenly the clock struck six sullen strokes. The silence in the courtyard was agonizing. I felt my heart beat against my breast. I could hardly swallow. Terror, the terror of suspense was communicated from one to the other. I could not bear the eyes of my neighbor, and he in turn looked away from me, with perceptible shuddering. At once a door grated and eyes went toward it. The woman, in dark skirt and waist turned down at the neck, was being led in, supported by two chaplains—a short woman, with large body, but small head, her face pallid, stained with tears. The public removed their hats in presence of death. I saw with a shudder that this woman had but one leg. In haste the prosecutor read the sentence in a voice scarcely audible. When he had finished, the chaplains led the woman to the table, placed the crucifix in her hands, and recited their prayers. I heard a harsh voice interrupt them: "Gentlemen, do your duty." The two assistants then seized the woman, led her quickly to the plank, to which they secured her by straps over the legs and

arms. At this point she cried in a voice which made my blood run cold: "Oh my God, my God, save me!" Simultaneously there was a dull thud, the heavy blade had fallen, the blood spouted from the trunk in a jet, as the head fell into a basket. One of the assistants unstrapped the body and it was placed in a coffin. As they did so, a chaplain took the crucifix from the hands of the dead. Ten minutes passed, minutes of torture, then from the crowd rose a stifled sigh as the man was led in. He was pale, but showed no emotion, refusing the crucifix, and suffering himself to be laid upon the plank without protest. Again that dull thud. Another drama of passion was over. Shaken and sick, I hastened away, trembling so that my teeth chattered and I could speak to no one. And, my dear sir, for a week what atrocious dreams! Assuredly with such an example I shall never commit a murder. Will you accept, sir, my sincere greetings and felicitations.

EDOUARD FABRY.

To the Editor of THE THRILL BOOK.

Talk about thrilling experiences! Here is one that actually happened to me in the Philippine Islands during the year 1902.

My father was a newspaper man, and I was lucky enough to accompany him on a wide tour through the Orient, ending in a long stay at Manila. Accommodations were very bad in those days. The Americans were still fighting in the provinces. Finally we secured rooms at a small boarding house conducted by a Spanish lady.

It must have been about a week after our arrival that she announced her intention of moving into larger quarters. The house she had selected was in the Walled City close to the corner of Calle Palacio and Calle Real. It was one of those enormous old buildings where the servants occupy the lower quarters.

As it happened, my father and I moved in the night before her furniture arrived. A Mr. R—— occupied the next room. Our belongings were hustled in and piled hurriedly into one corner of the room. We could hear him moving about next door, evidently trying to find a comfortable place to sleep. We were the only people in all that gloomy, dark house.

The candles we used cast peculiar shadows over the walls. In that country canvas is used for wall material, and one can hear voices very plainly for a distance of two or three rooms on either side. I will confess now that I felt quite nervous in the complete silence that followed the retirement of Mr. R——.

He was known for being a heavy drinker. Later on I could hear him snoring loudly. The sound was so close that I figured his bed was parallel to mine on the other side of the wall. This proved later to be exactly the case.

The following day witnessed the arrival of the landlady and her furniture. She was full of apologies for causing us the trouble. We insisted that it was all very well. In fact, we were glad to get quarters, and would have been content with almost anything, so it was clean.

She also apologized for putting Mr. R—— next door, saying that he drank heavily, and often had delirium tremens. During the day he was very quiet, however. That evening he began yelling for some unaccountable reason. The landlady tried to get in, but he refused to allow this, demanding that she bring him some ice water. After this he subsided into a second silence.

During the night I was suddenly awakened out of a sound sleep by hearing him shriek at the top of his voice. It was so close that it seemed as though some one were yelling right into my ear. I leaped to my feet. My father had gotten up also. He quieted me. The yelling continued. In the hall we found the other boarders congregated around Mr. R——'s door. His shrieking continued for a time. The landlady could not get him to answer the door.

I finally fell asleep. I remember distinctly dreaming that I was assisting him to his feet as he was dying. The dream was so clear that I awakened the second time in a cold sweat. Hearing nothing, I dropped off again.

The following day he was quiet. The landlady said it was evidently all over. Often he had these spells, and then rested for two or three days, finally coming around and eating enormously.

We paid no attention to him until the evening of the second day. It was terribly hot. Not being used to the tropics, I suffered greatly. It made me restless, uncomfortable most of the time.

Finally I spoke of the matter to my father. He laughed and told me not to worry.

The next day the landlady herself began to worry: She banged at the door, but received no answer. She returned again later in the afternoon, and this time broke in with the assistance of some of the muchachos. They found him lying dead, decomposition having already set in.

I had been sleeping for two nights almost in the same bed with a dead man! Believe me, I was really worried this time. My bed

rested against the thin wall and on the other side his bed occupied the same position.

I realized for the first time, then, that the odor which had bothered us was the poor fellow next to us. I may as well confess that I moved my room. Sincerely,

RALPH VERNON.

15 Harvard Street, Arlington Heights, Mass.

Editor THE THRILL BOOK.

If it is a thrill you are looking for, here it is as it happened to me when I was not looking for it.

As I was about to leave after spending an evening with a family on Seventy-ninth Street, New York City, one of the young ladies of the house suggested I take an umbrella, as it was raining. I stepped into the front room and, sure enough, it was raining, but while I verified this fact, something else caught my attention, something else besides the witness of the night.

As every one knows, this locality is the typification of law and order. A sense of security is as pronounced as wealth is evident, so a man I saw rolling an automobile tire along the street, even at that hour of night, roused in me no suspicion. A second man following closely, and a third, all briskly rolling a tire, caused a vague feeling of uncanniness to give place to apprehension, which in turn was crystallized into complete comprehension as I observed in the other direction four men all in the act of placing a tire in a waiting touring car.

A well-organized band of thieves was stripping the extra tires from the cars drawn up alongside the curbs.

With this full realization of the situation came also the realization that some one else had seen the episode, and was taking measures to stop the theft by grabbing the last man as he rolled his tire toward the waiting machine.

His first cry of "Hey there!" proved his last, however, for back of this man was one I had as yet not seen who, coming up as if by arrangement, dealt a blow on the head with some blunt weapon, crushing the skull with a sickening thud. That roused me from a spectator to a participant in this kaleidoscopic affair. Hitherto all my faculties had been engaged in the mere realization of these fast transferring events. Now, with one cry of "Murder" I dashed hatless to the street. A car was just passing. Into it I plunged, intent upon only one thing, to catch the fleeing auto rounding the corner. Breathlessly I pointed it out to the driver,

who nodded, put on all speed, and rounded the corner also.

It was a vain attempt. That car was the crook's rear guard. We had only gone four blocks when out of the dark a blunt weapon, the same possibly used before that night, descended upon my hatless and hapless head. I regained consciousness two hours later, under some dripping bushes in Central Park. Nor were these miscreants apprehended. My information was meager. There were no clues.

Two months later a robbery in another city attracted my attention. The night watchman had been killed by a blow on the head by some "blunt weapon," the papers put it. My conviction is those were the same criminals who furnished me with the direst thrill of my life. Sincerely,

EDWARD THOMAS.

14 Patchin Place, New York City.

To the Editor THE THRILL BOOK,

DEAR SIR: Let me congratulate you on the latest issue of THE THRILL BOOK. This is the first one I have had occasion to run up against, and it is so worth while I want all the previous issues. Will you kindly let me know if it is possible to get these?

I notice you are asking for personal experience from your readers. In looking back on a somewhat humdrum life, there is one incident I witnessed which will perhaps interest your readers. It certainly thrilled the thousands who saw it, and must live forever in their minds.

It was the occasion of the sudden breaking up of the ice bridge at Niagara Falls in the winter of 1911.

I had just come up from the "bridge," and was walking through the foyer of the hotel when a man breathlessly rushed by and shouted to all in the hall: "The ice bridge is collapsing! For God's sake, get help! There are hundreds down there!" The effect was electrical. We all rushed to the street. It seemed as though everybody in town had got the news, and was stampeding to the river. Thousands were running by, many coatless and hatless, and a queer hush was over all, the snow even softening the tramp of their feet.

Soon we were joined by the fire apparatus, and the rush of its sleighs and the weird sounding of its gongs and bells accentuated the excited tension of the rushing crowd. Once in a while somebody would exclaim, "God, what has happened!" and the news was breathlessly passed on.

I made my way to the brink of the Basin, where a good view of the Falls is obtainable.

There I saw what had happened. The "bridge" had suddenly broken up into floes. With a great roar and crack the ice had started to "go out." It was, fortunately, lunch time, and only a few hundred had been left on the bridge. The rush to the shores had been instantaneous, for what had been a gay holiday gathering had in a moment become a horror-stricken crowd, frenzied with the murderous instinct of self-preservation.

By the time I arrived, there were about twenty-five people still on the floes. They were leaping from one cake to another toward the shore, where the ice was already rending and smashing to pieces. Ropes were being thrown out, and although many were hurt in their passage through the surf of ice, all were safely landed but three. To these three came the supreme tragedy.

A young lad was seen to be jumping from floe to floe. To the onlookers he was running a hopeless race, for a large expanse of water lay between him and safety. Nearer shore was a man and woman on another floe, which was moving out. There was one chance in a thousand that they could make it as their floe had not yet become separated from the main shore. The man could be seen helping the woman across the breaks. They came to a wider stretch. She lost her nerve, turned, and hesitated. The moment was lost, and in a second the gap became wider and their floe began to move slowly, ever so slowly, out into the center of the Basin. They must have realized their plight, for the watchers saw the woman drop to her knees in an attitude of prayer. Her companion ran first to one end and then to the other, and then back to her side. Meanwhile the boy had realized his danger also, and was standing upright, with folded arms, facing downstream, peering under the bridges toward the Rapids. Very slowly the two floes with their freight of human tragedy moved on toward the center of the stream. The watchers, knowing it would take a long time to reach the Steel Arch Bridge, stood fascinated, but powerless. Minutes seemed hours, but nothing could be done. Gradually the floes drew closer together and the lad was seen to jump from floe to floe till he reached the one bearing the man and woman. A gleam of hope and sympathy must have come to them for they all clasped hands, and the woman rose from her kneeling position.

It was seen from the shore that the fire brigade had lowered three ropes from the First Bridge from just above where the ice must pass. The tension was almost too great to bear. It took fifteen minutes

for the ice to drift down to the bridge, and the first noise heard from the thousands of watchers was when it was seen that the man and boy, ignoring two of the ropes, seized the one trailing over the head of the woman. A cheer arose as they commenced to tie it around her waist. A moment later it was changed to a groan, and women screamed as the rope swung loosely away and out of their reach. They had passed this chance by, had fumbled. Poor humans, staring Fate in the face, had failed.

The woman, utterly unnerved by the failure, was prostrate on the ice, with her head resting on her arm face down, fearing to look ahead. The man knelt down and was seen to gently raise her up and kiss her. As they drifted down, he patted her gently and comforted her. The lad stood smiling, looking from one shore to the other at the thousands watching the death ride. We could not but admire the cool courage of the lad.

Again hours seemed to pass as the ice drifted down toward the lower bridge and to more ropes, but to certain death beyond. The Whirlpool Rapids could be plainly seen, and their roar must have reached the ears of the three. The nearer they came to the bridge the swifter ran the ice, for the current is strong in the Gorge. As they passed under, the man was seen to throw away his mittens and, seizing the woman round the waist, he clutched at the trailing rope. It was a forlorn but heroic effort, for he must have known that the chance lay for him alone. The sudden pull took him off his feet, he lost his hold, and fell back onto the floe.

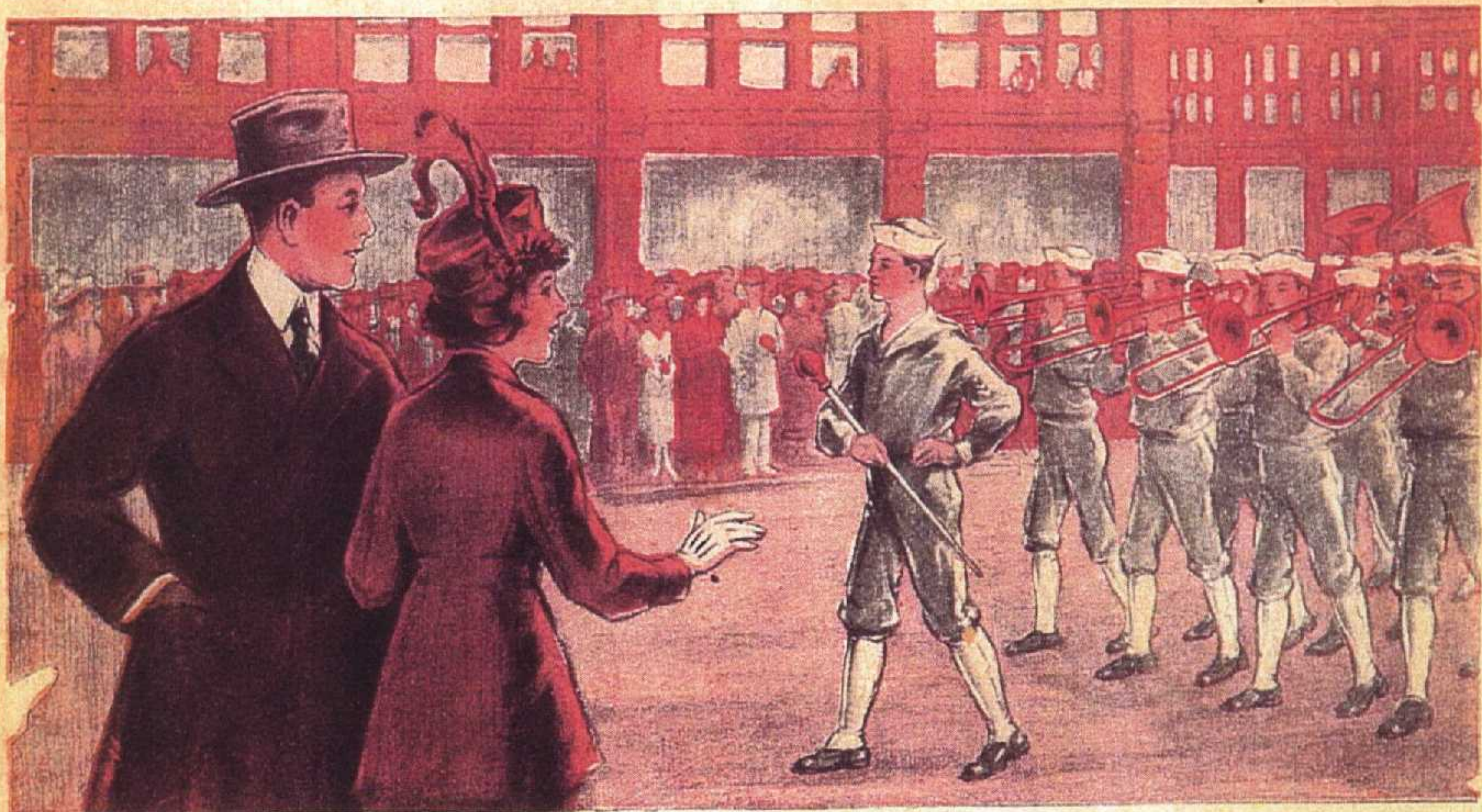
A hoarse cheer went up from the shores as it was seen the boy had taken his chance and was already suspended in air, climbing frantically up the rope. They started pulling up. It seemed certain that a life had been saved. Yet it was not to be so, for halfway up his strength gave out, and he fell back into the river. A faint cry was heard, but he was never seen again.

The man and woman were drifted swiftly into the Whirlpool Rapids. We saw them clasped together until within a few yards of the breakers. Then, standing together, with hands clasped and uplifted, they were soon engulfed by the waters from which no man has emerged.

The drama was ended. I looked up into the sky and was surprised to see the sun still high. It must be near night, thought I, but the drama of eternity had lasted only one hour. Yours very sincerely,

LAURENCE J. GOMME.

Box 321, Ramsey, N. J.



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Imagine the thrill these words gave Mr. Ferdinand Hohnhorst, of Covington, Ky., as he stood on a crowded street, watching the great Peace Parade, when Meyer's Military Band came swinging along playing his song, “Uncle Sam, the Peaceful Fighting Man.” But let him tell his story in his own words:—

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(Signed) Ferdinand Hohnhorst.”



Leo Friedman

Leo Friedman, Our Composer whom Mr. Hohnhorst speaks so enthusiastically about, is one of America's most gifted composers and the author of many great song hits. Among his great successes are “Meet Me Tonight in Dreamland,” the sales of which reached the enormous total of more than two million copies. Others that reached into the million class were “Let Me Call You Sweetheart” and “When I Dream of Old Erin”. Mr. Friedman writes music to words, that cause them to fairly throb with feeling and musical charm. He has been styled “America's Favorite Composer,” and properly so, for his melodies have reached the hearts of millions of the American people, and made them sing.

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